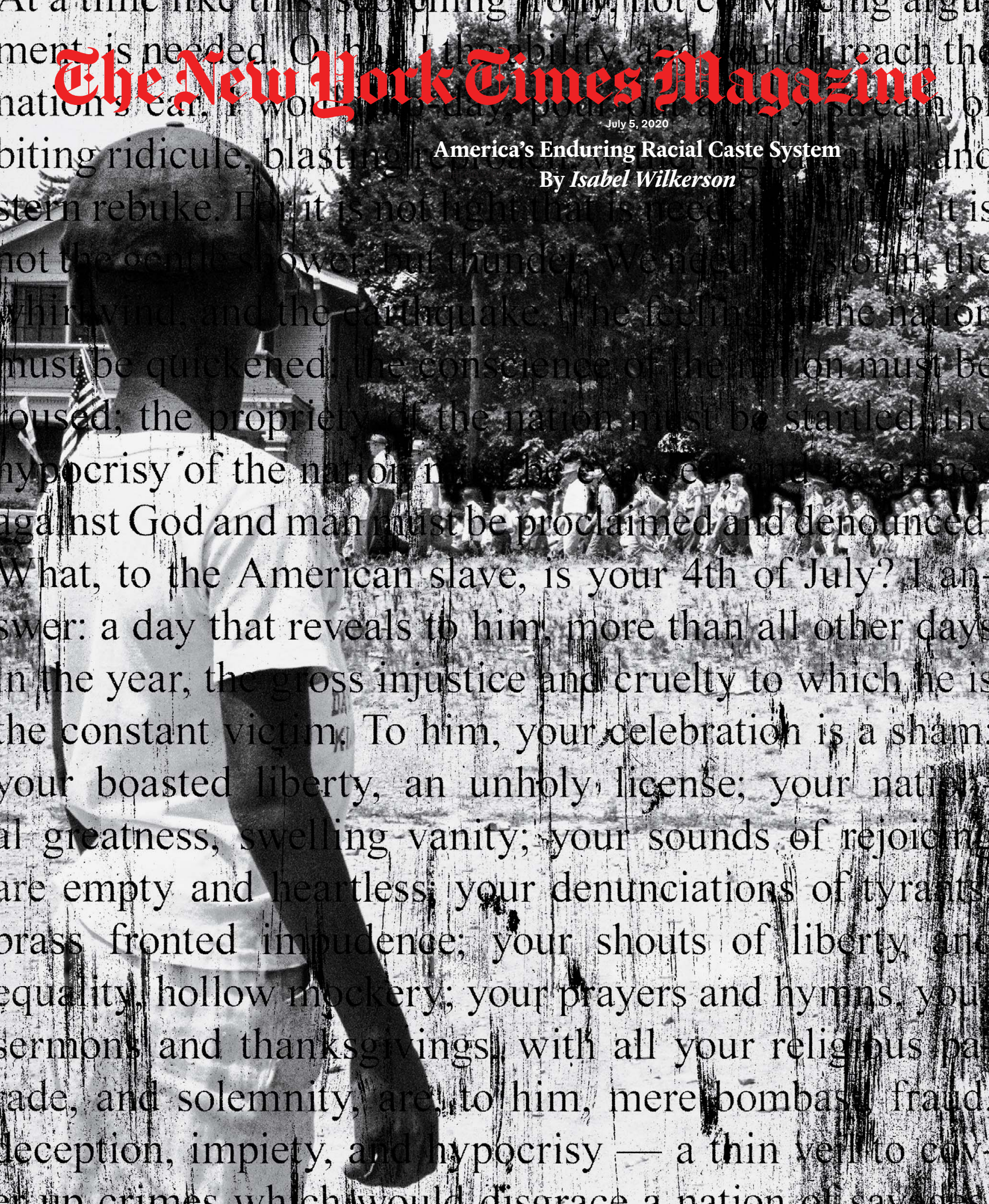


The New York Times Magazine

July 5, 2020

America's Enduring Racial Caste System

By Isabel Wilkerson



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Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. A coordinated attack by suicide bombers in April 2019, which killed 269 people, is still reverberating throughout the country. Page 34.



Photograph by Mahesh Shantaram for The New York Times

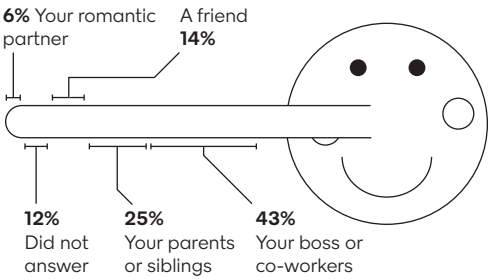
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Behind the Cover *Gail Bichler, creative director: "In this week's cover story, Isabel Wilkerson argues that the unseen skeleton of the United States is its racial caste system. Adam Pendleton superimposed Frederick Douglass's famous Independence Day speech, in which he asks, "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?" on a photo of a boy watching a group protest the integration of a school in Little Rock, Ark., in 1959. We felt the resulting image captured the sense of separation that still exists between racial groups that we must grapple with on July 4."* Artwork by Adam Pendleton. Source photograph (boy and crowd): John T. Bledsoe/Library of Congress.

Isabel Wilkerson	<i>"America's Enduring Caste System,"</i> Page 26	Isabel Wilkerson, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Humanities Medal, is the author of "The Warmth of Other Suns," which was named one of Time's 10 Best Nonfiction Books of the 2010s and won the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award for nonfiction. Her article in this issue is excerpted from her forthcoming book, "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents." "This is the culmination of decades of research into our country's unseen caste system," Wilkerson says. "We need new language if we are to understand our history, ourselves and how to move forward. This is a book I did not seek to write but felt I had to write."
Joshua Rashaad McFadden	<i>"The Outcast,"</i> Page 40	Joshua Rashaad McFadden is a visual artist primarily working in photography. He is known for his portraiture and use of archival material with a focus on identity, masculinity, history, race and sexuality.
Jon Mooallem	<i>"Charlie Kaufman's Head Trips,"</i> Page 20	Jon Mooallem is a writer at large for the magazine and the author of a book about the great Alaska earthquake of 1964, "This Is Chance!" He last wrote a feature for the magazine about the Camp Fire in Paradise, Calif.
Adam Pendleton	<i>Cover artwork</i>	Adam Pendleton is an artist known for conceptually rigorous and formally inventive paintings, collages, videos and installations that address history and contemporary culture.
Elaina Plott	<i>"The Outcast,"</i> Page 40	Elaina Plott is a national political reporter for The New York Times. She previously covered the White House for The Atlantic, where she also wrote extensively about the transformation of the Republican Party in the Trump era.
Samanth Subramanian	<i>"Family Secrets,"</i> Page 34	Samanth Subramanian is the author of "A Dominant Character: The Radical Science and Restless Politics of J. B. S. Haldane," to be published later this month. The last feature he wrote for the magazine was about Singapore's creating new land for itself.

Dear Reader: Whom Are You Most Comfortable Lying To?

The magazine publishes the results of a study conducted online in March 2020 by The New York Times's research-and-analytics department, reflecting the opinions of 2,250 subscribers who chose to participate.



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Readers respond to the 6.21.2020 issue.



RE: PARENTING

Carvell Wallace wrote about trying to parent his black teenagers through the protests and the pandemic.

Mr. Wallace, I'm dumbstruck. Your piece is the most astounding writing I've read ... no ... experienced in years. I started to extract different parts to show what touched me the most, but then tears clouded my cursor, so I'll stick with one of the first ones I highlighted. As a girl who was completely unmoored watching "Roots" and "The Day After Tomorrow," and fished in swamps and climbed down into quarries, and raced from Kmart blue-light special to blue-light special, I have to repeat this — it ... glows: "She faces the wind with all of her bodily might, exulting in the confrontation. The magic-hour light is a cinematic gold on her face. The wind whips her hair. Her hoodie and black track pants cover her like modern armor." EXTRAORDINARY. My most heartfelt thanks.

Lisa Goodall, Connecticut

I am not black, not a parent, but to hear this experience told in such a lovely way, of describing hope, doubt, fear, angst and love of living, was inescapable. Thank you for sharing a tiny, perceptive look into your life. Humanity starts at home, and I am better for being part of yours.

R. Kress, Denver

This incredible piece moved me to tears. The author tells the lessons every parent learns, but withal teaches us of the particular challenges, fears, experiences and joys he faces as the black father of black children who live in the United States of

America. It is very hard to decide to love everyone, harder to live up to that goal, harder still to love oneself and hardest of all to forgive ourselves when we realize we cannot fix the world for our children.

Jo Burgoyne Cone, Pittsford, N.Y.

Mr. Wallace, this is the first time I've ever commented on an article — I've been a Times subscriber for 15 years. The image of your daughter on the hill against the wind made me cry — it was so beautiful and hopeful. You sound like a pretty awesome dad. Thank you for giving all of yourself to this piece and to your kids. I'm rooting for you all.

Minna, Los Angeles

Oh, my. What a gift to read this. A part of me wants to run around looking for even more of your work. But another part just wants to sit with this perfect essay, in the powerful place it has delivered me to. Thank you, Mr. Wallace.

Kate, California

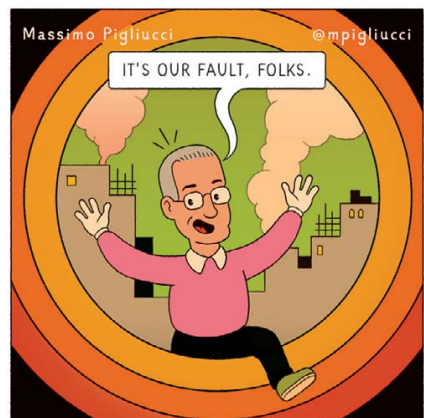
This is absolutely beautiful writing. I haven't read an essay that touched me so deeply in quite some time. It actually made me cry. Thank you, Mr. Wallace.

Julie W., New Jersey

You live across the bay from me. Can't believe this is the first time I've read your wonderful writing. If you are a caring person, your heart will be broken again and again. And you will fail the people you love repeatedly, even as you are doing your best. And yet the way you share this is also a healing. Thank you.

Lola, California

I was super bummed while reading the Jon Stewart piece. I couldn't quite



THE STORY, ON TWITTER

A powerful discussion — imagine how much stronger communities could be if we invested in them this way.

@AanchieD

understand why, since I am a fan. But it reminded me of how I feel whenever I see a futuristic film and everyone in charge is white and male: uninspired. I'm so glad I continued on and read Carvell Wallace's essay. His words have been on my mind ever since. "I have spent a long time avoiding loving myself so that if I am killed it won't be that great a loss." What a gut-wrenching sentence! I am inspired.

Kate, Philadelphia

RE: JON STEWART

David Marchese interviewed the former talk-show host for the Talk column.



This was such a breath of fresh air. This interview articulated well the difference between both-sides-ism, which is just lazy, and the call to be specific, to understand that every horrible thing that happens is a symptom of a deeper problem that poisons everyone, and simply demonizing your adversaries or dysfunctional institutions isn't solving the problem. That is exactly why he could never go into electoral politics or serious journalism; he is the perfect court jester, like the fool in "King Lear," speaking truth to power. I don't worship him. Jon Stewart's show was increasingly unwatchable in its later years as he became more like the kind of smug pundit he had been satirizing. But Stewart doesn't have to be perfect to be valuable. He has a gift for showing us the complacency of certainty, the danger of righteousness; there's always another level to explore that will get us closer to a path toward equality and justice, and away from a civil war that benefits no one.

James Jacobs, Washington

Send your thoughts to magazine@nytimes.com.

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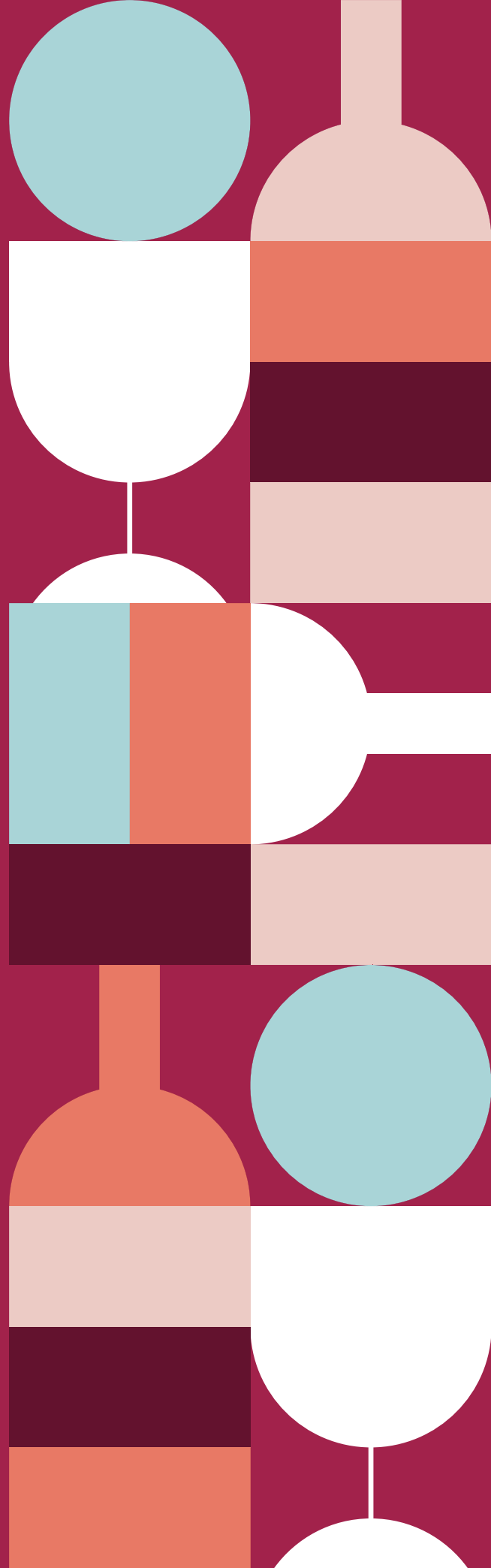
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Off Topic



Should a black protest movement be used to advance other progressive priorities? ● By Jay Caspian Kang ● The night after a handful of activists in Seattle dragged some barricades onto the street and announced the establishment of the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, more than a thousand people marched to City Hall for a rally. The action was notable because of the presence of Kshama Sawant, a City Council member. A



Trotskyist and avowed radical, Sawant has a key to City Hall. She simply opened the front door and let the protesters in.

They ran through the halls and chanted, but before too long, everyone settled down to listen to the speakers, among them a young black protester wearing a bright orange backpack. “At most of the protests I’ve been to, it’s all white people speaking and maybe two black people,” the speaker said in a calm monotone. “I’m tired of white people talking for me,” the speaker continued. “I love you guys — you’re all my allies, and I love you all — but I would love for all the black people to talk up here. I’m really sorry. Also, for all the council members and

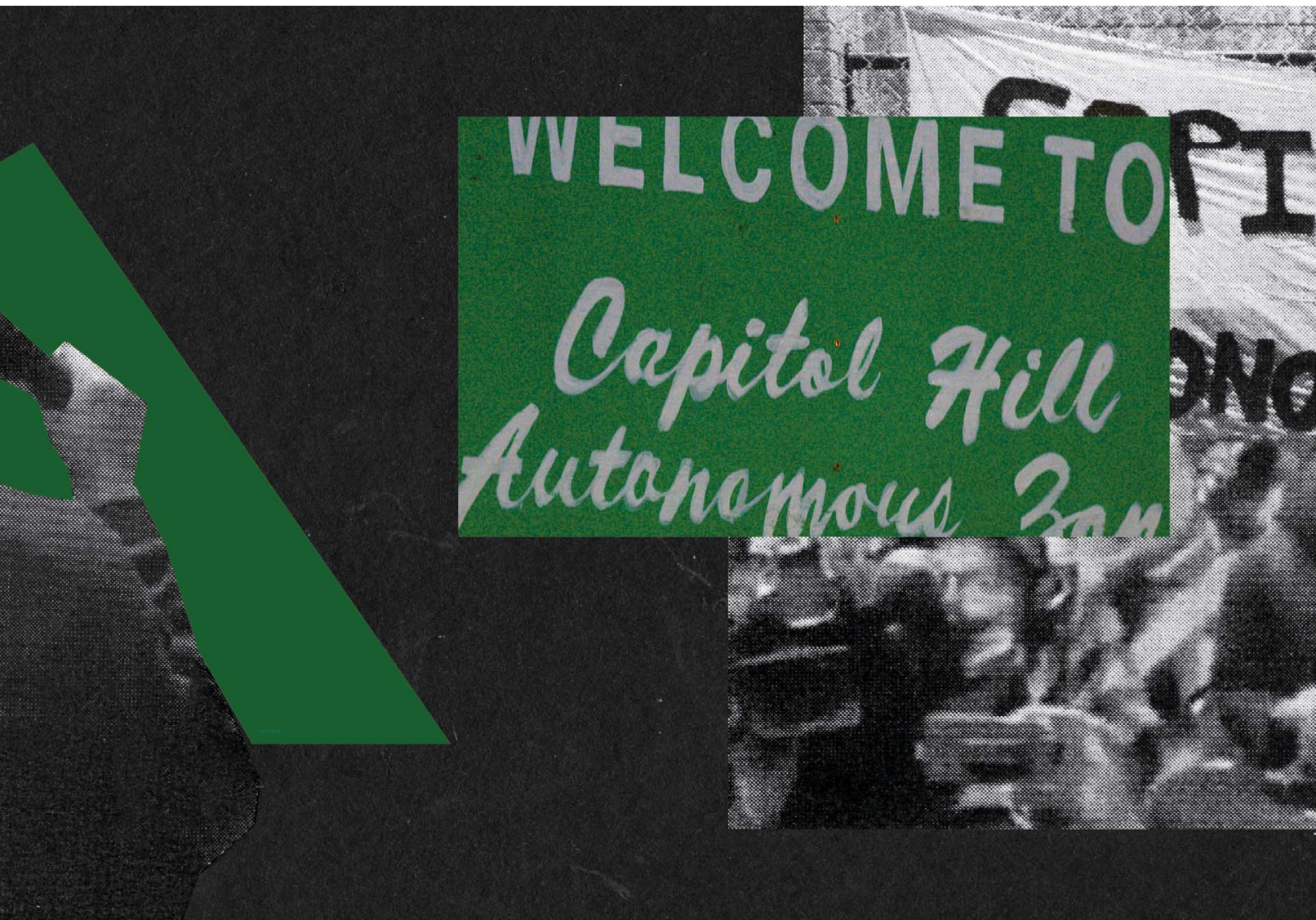
affiliates, please stop using Black Lives Matter for your political campaigns. I’m really sorry. I want to tax Amazon, too; I want to do all those things, too. But this is not a movement for you to be politically active, for you to be politically correct and for you to gain all these votes. Please stop taking advantage of us. I’m really sorry. I want to do all these things, too, but can we please talk about Black Lives Matter for one second?”

A video of these moments showed up online. In the days that followed, I watched it over and over, because it seemed to be asking a handful of questions that lie at the heart of this movement. First, and obviously: What should

‘Can we please talk about Black Lives Matter for one second?’

be done about all these white people? Protest data is notoriously bad, but it hardly seems controversial to ask whether there has ever been an American civil rights moment in which hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of white people have taken to the streets, thousands of whom have been tear-gassed, beaten or chased down by the police. Perhaps not coincidentally, there has never been a moment when the “authorities” — school boards, City Councils, mayors — seem so willing to embrace policies that would have seemed impossible a month earlier. And yet most of these proposals are mere proposals. Even if the goal extends only to reforming Police Departments, pressure

Above: Source photographs by David Ryder/Getty Images; screen grabs from Twitter. Opening page: Screen grab from Twitter.



must still come from the streets; white people will have to continue to show up.

The speech could also double as a prompt for a full-throated debate on the left about the complex interplay between representation-based identity politics and other political goals. Many activists would agree with the young speaker and say that a movement on behalf of black lives should be led by black voices and focus on the issues facing black people. Elected politicians might cringe at being sidelined and argue that a member of the City Council, especially one as far left as Sawant, belongs in the movement. Indelicate Marxists might argue that the identity of speakers should not matter and that

the only meaningful action would be to leverage the movement to tax Amazon. They might point out that it has driven up Seattle rents, which in turn has led to rapid gentrification of black neighborhoods; action against Amazon could secure universal victory. The relevance of such debates, and even more so their resolution, is unclear.

These sorts of deliberations are not new. They were on the minds of the Combahee River Collective, a coalition of black queer feminist radicals who first coined the term “identity politics” in 1974. The C.R.C., whose origins have been revisited recently in Asad Haider’s “Mistaken Identity” and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s “How

Amount that would be raised annually by the Tax Amazon legislation, according to its sponsors, Kshama Sawant and Tammy J. Morales of the Seattle City Council: **\$500 million**

We Got Free,” grew out of dissatisfaction with the narrow focus of the National Black Feminist Organization, which in turn had left the broader, white-led feminist movement. The C.R.C. believed that what set it apart from those two groups was its economic analysis, which called for an end to “bourgeois-feminist” politics. “Solidarity,” as Taylor points out, was not “subsuming your struggles to help someone else” but rather strengthening “the political commitments from other groups by getting them to recognize how the different struggles were related to each other and connected under capitalism.”

The C.R.C.’s vision of identity politics bears little resemblance to the modern

version that tends to value representation over economic and racial justice — and at times, ritual over action. Representative Eric Swalwell, a California Democrat and former presidential candidate, recently challenged his Republican colleagues in Congress to “unequivocally say that black lives matter.” Swalwell’s heart might have been in the right place, but his stunt was pure ritual: checking to see who will say the right words to show they care and who will not. It’s easy to hear the protester’s address in Seattle’s City Hall and look at the public flagellations of white privilege and conclude that the speaker’s demands might result only in more Swalwell-like pandering.

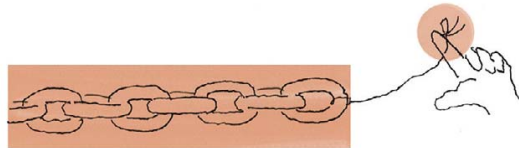
But perhaps the most telling and wrenching parts of the young protester’s monologue were the constant, exhausted apologies. They didn’t sound like pleadings to be heard so much as weary incantations from someone who understands the way things go in Seattle. If white people keep coming to the protests, how do you prevent this black protest movement from becoming a vehicle for white progressives to try to advance all their other hobbyhorses? If every action turns into a voter-registration party, the movement will have failed to secure the bare minimum of what it set out to accomplish: a radical change in policing.

The future of these national protests depends, in no small part, on the careful navigation between Swalwell’s sloganeering, gestural version of identity politics and a black-centered radical movement that calls, in the words of the C.R.C., for an inclusive politics that also fights for “women, third world and working people.” At the protests I’ve been to in Oakland, Calif., the crowds come from every conceivable background, and I have sensed in them an intense desire for some message of solidarity focused squarely on the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. This, as the City Hall speaker pointed out, cannot be a carrot to keep white people engaged, nor should it stop only at police reform. But it could instead sound something like the C.R.C.’s belief that “if black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free, since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.” ♦

If every action turns into a voter-registration party, the movement will have failed to secure the bare minimum of what it set out to accomplish: a radical change in policing.

Poem Selected by Naomi Shihab Nye

At this crucial time of reckoning in American racial justice, consider Sullivan’s Island, a suburb of Charleston, S.C., once a port where an outsize number of enslaved people entered North America. Toni Morrison once noted the lack of an appropriate marker there for its heartbreaking history. A society in her name helped create one; in his stunning full-length debut collection, “Heed the Hollow,” Malcolm Tariq has created another. “What work ... besides witness?” his poem asks, in these days when people take to the streets to say, I stand up and walk, I respect, for you, for all of us.



On Sullivan’s Island

By Malcolm Tariq

I heed a path trotted for me before.
I am this impaired — forgetting
and forgetting and forgetting. What else
is this wave crashing into shore
but an attempt to cleave remembrance?
Overhead, the dark sky engulfs
the Low Country, once welcome spot
and terror for the ancestors, always
a nest for the captors. Now,
baby strollers and casual dog walks
file before a single marquee meant to hold
place for history — leisure where once labor.
What work have I come here to do
besides witness? I go from shore to shore
seeking clarity, to stand on the threshold
of past and present where land and sea
court death. I search my mind for what remains
of generational sanity. There is nothing
but bondage. Ahead, the sign reads:
“Deadly currents, deep holes”
and forbids the swim out. I could chase
the distance with salt. I could run
face forward into what has already claimed me
without regret. This ocean swallows
the whole of me. I could join it
or become another buoy signaling lost.

Naomi Shihab Nye is the Young People’s Poet Laureate of the Poetry Foundation in Chicago. Her latest book is “Cast Away,” from Greenwillow Books. Malcolm Tariq is from Savannah, Ga. He holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Michigan and lives in New York. His debut collection, “Heed the Hollow” (Graywolf Press, 2019), won the Cave Canem Poetry Prize.

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I've Protested for Racial Justice. Do I Have to Post on Social Media Too?



I am a white college student trying to be a better racial-justice advocate in the wake of George Floyd's death. While I have not been very politically active in the past (which I regret), recently I have attended a protest, donated a lot of my savings to bail funds and related nonprofits, called my representatives about these issues and tried to educate myself about black history and black voices. However, I have not posted on my personal social media regarding Black Lives Matter. I don't think I have a unique perspective to add to this conversation, and I don't like the scrutiny that comes with a social media post. I also worry that if I do post about Black Lives Matter, it would be motivated mainly by virtue signaling.

I believe my time would be more effectively spent supporting the B.L.M. movement in other ways. But I've also heard the argument that everyone has an obligation to post and that staying silent on these platforms is morally wrong. What do you think: Does being an ally require engaging with social media?

Name Withheld

Citizens in a democracy share a collective responsibility for guiding the ship of state. That's why progress toward racial justice in our country is something that we should all do our fair share to advance. Like so many Americans, you've been moved by the wrenching spectacle of a man's life slowly snuffed out by an officer of the state, and troubled that black people continue to suffer from police violence far out of proportion to their numbers. Unlike most, you've set out to make a difference. If everyone else had done as much as you've done, we'd certainly be way ahead. So I see no cause to complain about how much you're doing. Something is part of everyone's fair share only if everyone's doing it is necessary to achieve justice. People are not morally obliged to have a social media account in the first place; when they do, they should be free to post as little or as much as they like, to treat it as a narrowly personal zone or as a forum for conveying their broader concerns.

The issue you raise about "virtue signaling," however, merits closer attention. Some philosophers have argued that

public discourse is debased when people seek to raise their status within an in-group by displaying their moral qualities. "Grandstanding," the philosophers Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke argue in a new book of that title, involves forms of moral argument that are motivated by the vanity of self-presentation, by a desire to show that one is on the side of the angels. People engaged in moral grandstanding, they believe, will tend to "pile on," repeating a widely shared criticism; "trump up," depicting an innocent act as a major offense; and "ramp up," making ever stronger and more polarizing claims in order to outdo the moral claims of others. There's a Kantian aspect to their perspective: For Kant, it was of great importance that we not only do the right thing but do it for the right reason. The notion of virtue signaling, which was coined as a term of reproach, has precisely this Kantian valence. (This may come as a surprise to many who wield the term.)

But virtue signaling isn't necessarily a vice. Let's grant that it can have unfortunate aspects. Doesn't it have substantial positive ones too? When it comes to uncontested moral values, we can prize the unadvertised, anonymous good deed. (You rescue the drowning child, say, and keep quiet about your heroism.) Yet the moral revolutions I've researched involve what political scientists have called "norm cascades," and the social dimension of position-taking plays a critical role here. In the late 18th century, the English manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood started producing ceramic medallions with the words "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" above a black figure in chains. They became an immensely popular icon among abolitionists — a form of virtue signaling that helped fortify and spread a vital moral idea. In the words of another philosopher, Neil Levy: "Signaling is a central function of public moral discourse, with an important role to play in enabling cooperation." That's why bumper stickers and slogans posted on walls, whether digital or physical, can be meaningful.

The malign effects of grandstanding are real, but typically happen when an important instrument for moral progress is put in service of bad goals rather than good ones. "Piling on" can mean that people have collectively decided to renounce a previously tolerated evil. It mattered that a great many law-enforcement officials



Bonus Advice From Judge John Hodgman

Phoebe writes: I want to farm crickets in our home for our own consumption, but my husband is against it. He cites my previous project failures (compost worms) and existing responsibilities (kids). I argue that it's simple and worth a try. We already use commercially produced cricket flour every day!

I don't want to know how your worm farm failed — I presume it was very gross. But I can appreciate why your husband might feel your pivot to raising crickets (then freezing them into a stupor, then dehydrating them and then grinding them into flour) to be a terrifying (and loud) act of hobby escalation. That said, I love this idea for three reasons: Crickets are the protein of the future; it will be educational for your children to watch you pulverize and eat their bodies; and they are less gross than worms. But if this one flops, that's it. No moving on to mealworms or whatever.

To submit a query: Send an email to ethicist@nytimes.com; or send mail to The Ethicist, The New York Times Magazine, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. (Include a daytime phone number.)

and even some police-union representatives piled on against the callous killing of George Floyd. The charge of “trumping up” can arise from a genuine reassessment of once-taken-for-granted conduct — it’s the charge that the old-school sexually harassing boss makes when habits he considered harmless (“What’s wrong with telling a woman how sexy she looks?”) are properly seen in a new light. “Ramping up” can take us from the notion that homosexual conduct should be decriminalized to the notion that gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry.

In moments of moral change, people shift from merely recognizing a wrong to wanting to do something about it. And what drives that shift is, in part, a sense that those who don’t contribute to change aren’t just not doing something good; they’re forfeiting their entitlement to the respect of those around them. Not participating becomes dishonorable. In many of the moral revolutions I’ve written about — against slavery, dueling and foot-binding, for example — winning the moral argument is only the first step. To move a majority of people to live and act in new ways, you have to get them to feel that doing the right thing is now required for social respect. This is one area where social media can help. And if you believe that you can make a contribution here, you should be undeterred by the fear that you would be — or would be thought to be — virtue signaling. In order for new and better norms to arise, there has to be talk. But, as you recognize, there has to be more than talk. People have to take action. You’re to be commended for having done so already.

I am the co-author, along with three other scientists, of a paper we plan to submit to a prominent physics journal. Before I knew which journal we would choose, I invited a professor who is also a member of the editorial board of the journal in question to be a keynote speaker for a conference I helped organize. The professor accepted, and we’ve been in touch during the past few months about the conference.

I am concerned about a potential conflict of interest here. The professor will likely end up being the editor for the paper, which entails deciding whether to accept it for review. The eventual publication of the manuscript is based on the opinions of two reviewers and the editor. While I am certain that the conference invitation

will not bias the professor, I do not want even an appearance of bias, nor do I want the professor to think I expect special treatment. One option is to ask that the professor be excluded as the editor for this submission. I have discussed this issue with the senior co-author of the paper, and he does not think we should exclude the professor, who, in his view, is the most competent person to handle the manuscript. Still, there are other editors who are qualified. Should I insist on excluding this professor as an editor?

Name Withheld

Wait — have you done this professor a favor, or has the professor done you a favor? No matter. Being assessed by a person with whom you’ve had friendly dealings risks not just the appearance of bias but the reality of it. Even when we’re doing our level best to be scrupulously fair, we can be biased (sometimes negatively, out

Virtue signaling isn’t necessarily a vice.

of an excess of caution). Still, in a small subfield it can be hard to avoid such ties. And your professor has two presumably independent reviewers to rely on. We can’t rule out such bias entirely. The best we can do is have systems that curtail it.

The journal’s processes will work well if your paper is clearly excellent — unconscious bias on anyone’s part won’t determine the outcome — or clearly subpar, because the editors won’t publish something that would damage their reputations. Only if the paper is in the middle zone is the pull of propinquity going to matter. So you can probably let things be; any unfairness will be pretty marginal. The universe can handle one article that’s in a somewhat better journal than it deserves. ♦

Kwame Anthony Appiah teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. His books include “*The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*” and “*The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity*.”

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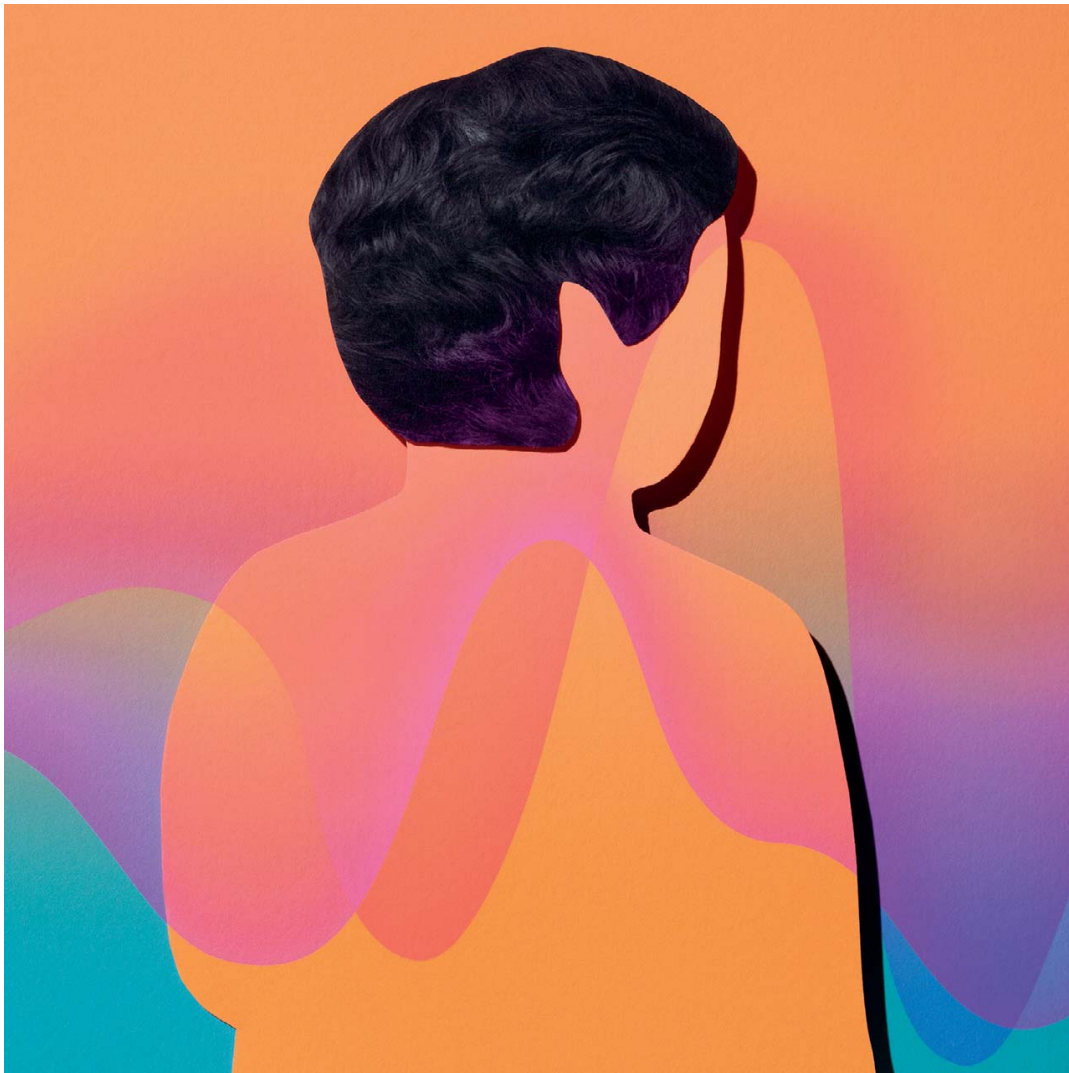
The Morning

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The New York Times

Her bouts of sweating and confusion were traced to dangerously low blood sugar. But what was causing it?



The early-morning light awakened the middle-aged man early on a Saturday morning in 2003. He felt his 51-year-old wife move behind him and turned to see her whole body jerking erratically. He was a physician, a psychiatrist, and knew immediately that she was having a seizure. He grabbed his phone and dialed 911. His healthy, active wife had never had a seizure before. But this was only the most recent strange episode his wife had been through over the past 18 months.

A year and a half earlier, the man returned to his suburban Pittsburgh home after a day of seeing patients and found his wife sitting in the kitchen, her hair soaking wet. He asked if she had just taken a shower. No, she answered vaguely, without offering anything more. Before he could ask her why she was so sweaty, their teenage son voiced his own observations. Earlier that day, the boy reported, “She wasn’t making any sense.” That wasn’t like her.

Weeks later, his daughter reported that when she arrived home from school, she heard a banging sound in a room in the attic. She found her mother under a futon bed, trying to sit up and hitting her head on the wooden slats underneath. Her mother said she was looking for something, but she was obviously confused. The daughter helped her mother up and brought her some juice, which seemed to help. With both episodes, the children reported that their mother didn’t seem upset or distressed. The woman, who had trained as a psychiatrist before giving up her practice to stay with the kids, had no recollection of these odd events.



The Problem Is Sugar

Her husband persuaded her to see her primary-care doctor. Upon hearing about these strange spells, the physician said she suspected that her patient was having episodes of hypoglycemia. Very low blood sugar sends the body into a panicked mode of profuse sweating, shaking, weakness and, in severe cases, confusion. She referred her to a local endocrinologist.

The specialist agreed that the patient was probably suffering from hypoglycemia. Having the right amount of glucose — the body’s preferred sugar — in the bloodstream is essential for the body to run normally. If it drops too low, the brain shuts down. Too much glucose in the

system, which is what those with untreated diabetes face, will injure blood vessels, nerve fibers, the heart and the kidneys. And extreme excesses in either direction can sometimes be fatal.

The endocrinologist gave the patient a glucometer and asked her to check her sugar when she felt these symptoms. It indicated that when the patient felt bad, her sugars were often low. But sometimes she checked when she felt fine, and her sugars would be low then too. Normal measurements for women are above 60. Many of her measurements were in the 40s, and some were as low as the 20s. Patients will often be confused or even unconscious when their blood-glucose levels go as low as hers did.

Why was her glucose dropping this way? The most concerning possibility was that she had a rare insulin-producing tumor, known as an insulinoma. Insulin, produced by the pancreas, helps cells take up the glucose they need for fuel from the bloodstream. Too much insulin leaves too little glucose in the circulation. But insulinomas are rare — with just four cases per one million patients in a given year.



Illness Script

To make a diagnosis, especially of a rare ailment, doctors often turn to illness scripts — detailed mental pictures of a disease that doctors develop based on what they've learned about it. The typical patient with an insulinoma, we are taught, is female and overweight from eating extra food to keep her blood glucose up. Symptoms are often the worst in the middle of the night, when sugars are naturally the lowest. Labs will show a low glucose and a high insulin level. Despite these mental pictures, insulinoma is often misdiagnosed as a neurological or a psychological problem before the right diagnosis is made. In one Mayo Clinic study, it took a year and a half for patients with an insulinoma to get the diagnosis, on average — and a few had been sick for decades.

The woman didn't fit this profile of a patient with an insulinoma. She was female but quite fit and not at all overweight. Most of her episodes of low sugars came during the day. And when the endocrinologist checked the patient's glucose and insulin levels in the lab, they were in the normal range.

If she didn't have an insulinoma, the endocrinologist explained to the patient, she probably had an unusual disorder known as reactive hypoglycemia. In this condition, the hormonal machinery that controls insulin tells the pancreas to release too much of it into the system after eating or exercising, which causes glucose levels to plummet.

The treatment for this oddity is mostly dietary. Patients are told to eat small, frequent meals containing more proteins and fats and fewer carbs. The patient and her husband were skeptical. They thought she had an insulinoma. Still, the patient did her best to implement her doctor's treatment plan for more than a year. It didn't work; she continued to have these occasional episodes of sweating and confusion.



The Day of the Seizure

The husband still recalls the fear he felt waiting for the ambulance to arrive the morning his wife had a seizure. When the E.M.T.s checked her sugar, it was down to 30. They quickly placed an IV and gave her a concentrated solution of sugar water. By the time she got to the local emergency room, her sugar was in the 50s. Reactive hypoglycemia shouldn't produce sugars low enough to cause a seizure. So again her doctors searched for evidence of an insulinoma. And once again, her glucose

and insulin levels were in the normal range when checked in the hospital. Neither a CT scan nor an M.R.I. showed any sign of an insulin-producing tumor.



A Second Opinion

The patient and her husband decided to get a second opinion, this time at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The gold standard for diagnosing an insulinoma involves a 72-hour fast in the hospital. Dr. Mary Korytkowski, an endocrinologist on the faculty there, would be running the test. When the patient and her husband explained her story, Korytkowski thought that this woman just might have one of the four in a million tumors. But she didn't say anything; first they needed evidence. During the fast, the patient's blood sugar is checked every few hours to see if it drops. The theory is that if you have a tumor producing insulin and don't eat and provide your system with glucose, blood-sugar levels will decrease, and you'll have symptoms of hypoglycemia.

Once the clock started, the patient's glucose hovered in the mid-50s to the mid-60s, and she felt fine. Sixteen hours in, her glucose dropped into the 40s, but still she had no symptoms. She wasn't sweaty; she wasn't confused. Nineteen hours in, with glucose still in the 40s, she finally started to feel that familiar sweaty shakiness. The test was stopped. Finally her sugar was low, and her insulin was too high.



Finding the Culprit

She probably did have an insulinoma, Korytkowski told the patient and her husband. Now they just had to find it. The endocrinologist ordered a special CT scan with very fine visual slices of the pancreas. If she had a tumor, there was a very good chance that's where they'd find it. And they did. A tiny mass, about the size of a green pea, located at the tail of the pancreas near the spleen.

A laparoscopic surgery was done to remove the tumor. And a week later, she was back to normal. Playing tennis. Running. Eating normally. For years after this diagnosis, the woman checked her sugars; she knew from her own medical-school training that this tumor could come back. But it hasn't; and after this much time, she hopes that it won't. ♦

Lisa Sanders, M.D., is a contributing writer for the magazine. Her latest book is "Diagnosis: Solving the Most Baffling Medical Mysteries." If you have a solved case to share with Dr. Sanders, write her at Lisa.Sandersmd@gmail.com.



'The Philosophy of Andy Warhol'

By Sophie Atkinson



I get sick a lot in the winter, so I spent this past January as I've spent many Januaries before it — in bed with a standard-issue flu. As the fever built, my mind hopscotched from one anxiety to the next. Gazing at the ceiling, I'd time-travel to the future — spring would, inevitably, be better: coffees with friends, a weekend hiking group. But when months elapsed and Covid-19 put spring on hiatus, it became clear that I, like anyone else fortunate enough to work from home, would be stuck inside.

One restless weekend, close to climbing the walls, I reread "The Philosophy of Andy Warhol."

Toward the end of the '60s, Warhol gravitated to the written word — in 1969, he started Interview magazine. When a literary agent suggested that he write his autobiography, Warhol told her that the writer Bob Colacello was already working on it. The agent suggested that Warhol write his "philosophy" instead: "I mean, if anyone has a philosophy, it's got to be you."

The elaborate, playful activities that Warhol espouses throughout the book make the pre-internet inside sound irresistible.

So Colacello and his fellow ghostwriter Pat Hackett, along with Brigid Berlin, sprang into action, taping interviews with Warhol. According to Steven M. L. Aronson, the book's editor, Warhol viewed "Philosophy" as a kind of self-help book: "He told me that he felt the book could give people a way that *they* could think, too, and that they could use it to help solve their *own* problems."

I first read the book seven years ago on a friend's recommendation. But now that I was so miserable indoors, it turned out

that I needed its self-help dimension far more than before. The biggest revelation now was that Warhol, a partygoer who could rarely attend a happening without at least a six-person retinue, was an ardent disciple of puttering around his apartment solo. “If I only had time for one vacation every 10 years,” he wrote, “I still don’t think I’d want to go anywhere. I’d probably just go to my room, fluff up the pillow, turn on a couple of TVs, open a box of Ritz crackers.”

Two weeks into isolation, I disabled Screen Time notifications on my iPhone out of sheer self-disgust — my leisure time was too internet-heavy for me to tolerate any record of how much time I now spent parked in front of a screen. During the first months, I did pub quizzes with friends via Zoom and Houseparty, binged entire Netflix series, enrolled in online art-history courses, sank hours into social media scrolling. I started feeling off-kilter — zombified, pre-coffee, even after plenty of caffeine. After weeks of steadily increasing my internet intake, the indoors began to feel uniformly monotonous.

On cracking open “Philosophy,” Warhol’s version of indoors felt light-years removed from mine. The elaborate, playful activities that Warhol espouses throughout the book make the pre-internet inside sound irresistible: ordering a \$3.95 pillow and using it for luxurious baths (“MAKES ME FEEL VERY RICH,” he wrote); penning fan letters to the famous writer you admire most or calling him every day until the writer’s mother tells you to knock it off; dying your eyebrows different colors from each other; starting a smell museum, so certain smells won’t get lost forever; consuming extravagant snacks (guava jam straight from the jar, chocolate-covered cherries, butter pecan ice cream).

Before “Philosophy,” I primarily thought of Warhol in terms of his productivity — the wildly prolific artist once told an interviewer that “everybody should be a machine.” Finding out that it was the truly mundane details of life that he savored the most — tending to his zits, vacuuming while watching daytime television — set me straight. Warhol didn’t appear to think time could be wasted. Instead, he argues, it’s “the little times you don’t think are anything while they’re happening,” and not the parties or adventures or art projects, that are the most significant.

It was the truly mundane details of life that Warhol savored the most.

I had always thought that hours at home spent not working or reading were a waste of time, and that leisure was best understood as a verb: traveling or going to a party or an exhibition or a park. As a freelancer, I had framed the hours I spent per week on minutiae or the time I spent in bed ill during winter as time I had squandered, since time equaled money, productivity, self-improvement. Held up to the light, this attitude felt repellent. “Philosophy” and the pandemic itself felt like a first step in battling it.

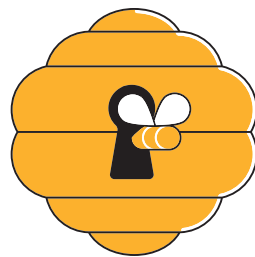
It has been tempting, months into self-isolation, to abandon ship and try to snap my old life back into place. In Berlin, where I’m based, the restrictions have been eased, and during this sudden surge of optimism, I’ve had to resist old comforts: hugging a friend, sharing a cigarette. Life reassuming its old shape

overnight, my long-held wish, seems increasingly unlikely. I can no longer use the outside world — the outdoors, other people, public spaces — for magic.

Reading “Philosophy” reminded me of an obvious truth: I don’t need to go outdoors or online to have fun. I didn’t metamorphose into a “Philosophy” personality overnight, but I did start sketching out a very silly board game and eating ice cream for breakfast on days when it felt particularly hard to get out of bed. I now maintain a diary-scrapbook mash-up and have traded my leggings for evening wear. Post-“Philosophy,” sometimes I now forget about my laptop for a few hours, lose my phone down the side of the sofa and forget about its whereabouts till morning. For the first time in months, life has started to feel a little lighter. ♦

Tip By Malia Wollan

How to Catch a Swarm of Bees



“Get the queen inside your box,” says Samantha Winship, a 40-year-old beekeeper and urban farmer in Winston-Salem, N.C. Don’t be afraid if you find a mass of as many as 20,000 honeybees in a tree or lumped together on the side of a building. Bees swarm in search of a new home, clustering around the queen to protect her. “They’re really not interested in hurting humans,” Winship says.

Don’t spray them with insecticide or otherwise harm them. Instead, call a local beekeeper. When Winship gets such calls, she dons her protective gear and tries to knock the swarm down into a box. If the bees are too high to reach, she lures them into a box baited with lemongrass essential oil, which mimics an attractant pheromone

released by worker bees. If you can capture the queen, the other bees will dutifully fly or march into your enclosure to be near her. Approach them in a calm state so you don’t trigger them to release alarm pheromones. “Slow down and focus your attention only on the bees,” Winship says.

A colony of bees from a dealer costs about \$200; catching a swarm is free. Winship currently has a swarm box set up near an abandoned house with bees inside a wall. Sometimes she finds feral bees born in the wild; other times they’re bees striking out from an overcrowded hive nearby. Honeybees were brought to America by European colonists in 1622 and have coexisted with humans here ever since. A swarm will usually stop over, often in a tree, for a day or two while scout bees search for a suitable home. You want to offer them spacious accommodation before they fly off again.

Winship, who is black, recently acquired a pink beekeeping suit so she doesn’t have to wear the standard white one with a hood. She’s teaching her children, including her 6-year-old son, Kingston, how to tend bees and cope with the occasional sting. “Don’t scream or jump up and down,” Winship says. “Just compose yourself and walk away.” Think of bees less as property and more as teachers. “Each bee has a job, and each job works for the greater good of the entire hive,” Winship says. “Why can’t people be more like that?” ♦

Sophie Atkinson
is a British writer
and editor.

Comfort at Breakfast: A big, flaky blueberry scone that's the perfect balm.



I promised myself that I'd read "War and Peace" during this long period of confinement. But I didn't. Just as I didn't read it the last time I promised myself that I would: when I was pregnant and imagined that, as with the Bach suites I listened to, our son would be born knowing its rhythms and beauty. I thought that now, while I was grounded, I'd clean my desk and keep it clean. I thought I'd

make better lists, keep better records, start a journal, create a daily schedule, stick to a daily schedule. But what I actually did is what I always do: I baked. Once again, the motto on my favorite sweatshirt, the one by my friend Joanne Chang the pastry chef, proved true: Bakers Gonna Bake.

And that's the line that came to mind when I got an email this spring from

Sweet and tangy: maple-blueberry scones.

Joanne's husband, Christopher Myers. Christopher, a restaurateur, is the Myers in Myers + Chang restaurant in Boston; Chang, of course, is Joanne, the founder of Boston's Flour Bakery + Cafe, of which there are now eight. Christopher wrote to tell me that he was going to bake cookies from one of my books — he did, and his Snowy-Topped Brownie Drops looked great in the picture he sent. Then

I caught an image of him on Instagram exuberantly blow-torching the meringue frosting on one of Flour's angel food cakes, and he looked as happy as a kid in a bubble bath.

I didn't know Christopher was a baker. And it turns out he's not, he told me, "unless called upon by a pandemic, a level of cabin fever that cannot be measured or a challenge. This is all three in one!"

Those of us who bake through challenges as well as celebrations know the comfort of the craft. We know that when everything is spinning wildly, we can count on butter, flour, sugar and eggs. We can transform them. We can make something satisfying, and we can share it. For so many of us, baking is a respite and often a refuge. I thought Christopher was smart to bake.

Joanne did, too, but she had another take on baking as balm. Think about what you do when you bake, she said when we chatted by phone recently. You choose a recipe, it has a list of ingredients, it's all laid out for you: You gather them; you measure them; you arrange them. Then, you follow the instructions to combine them in a particular way. "You have to focus," she said. "It's the focus that makes baking the perfect funnel for angst."

Joanne knows a lot about baking; she's been doing it ever since she left her job as a consultant, the job she got with her degree from Harvard in applied mathematics and the one she quit to become a pastry chef some 25 years ago. She started Flour in 2000 and told me that these last few months have reminded her of when she opened her first bakery, when she would do anything to keep it going. As was true for thousands of restaurateurs, the pandemic forced Joanne and Christopher to close their businesses and furlough their teams. "I gave a minute's thought to using the down time to clean my closet," Joanne said, but instead, she and her executive pastry chef, Jes Morris, headed back to the kitchen. The bakeries were shuttered, there was no staff, no money coming in, but donations to Flour's fund to feed needy Bostonians allowed them to bake for those on the front lines and, in the process, begin rehiring staff to bake with them and to make deliveries. A donation of \$5 bought a breakfast, \$10 bought a lunch. It still does. It's a continuing round robin of generosity and hard work that feeds

**Once again,
the motto on
my favorite
sweatshirt
proved true:
Bakers
Gonna Bake.**

hundreds of people each day. Hospitals, soup kitchens and shelters have been getting sandwiches and snacks, cookies, drinks and the bakery's famous breakfast pastries, among them scones, one of my favorite things from Flour.

I'm partial to Flour's maple-blueberry scones. They've got whole-wheat flour, but they're hardly "health food" — they've also got crème fraîche and plenty of butter, and they're glazed. They're a little sweet, but maple-syrup sweet, which means that there's a slight tang. There's also tang from the fresh berries and buttermilk. The scones are big, unusually big. And they have a texture that's unlike any other I've had: tender, like a layer cake, but also flaky, like a traditional scone. It wasn't until I made them myself that I realized that their texture is different because the technique for making them is different.

Most scone recipes call for the butter to be rubbed into the flour mixture until it's coated with flour and you've got lumps and pieces of butter the size of everything from a cornflake to a pea. In Joanne's recipe, half the butter gets this treatment, and it's what gives the scones their characteristic flakiness. The other half of the butter gets the reverse: It's beaten into the dry ingredients so that it becomes the coating for the flour. It's a way of protecting the flour from absorbing liquid, and it's what makes the scones so tender.

The recipe is brilliant and original. It's easy to follow, but you have to focus. It's the perfect thing to bake when you're looking to funnel some angst into something delicious.

Joanne Chang's Maple-Blueberry Scones

Time: 1 hour, plus chilling and cooling

- 1½ cups/240 grams whole-wheat flour
- 1 cup/130 grams all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¾ cup/170 grams unsalted butter (1½ sticks), cold, cut into ½-inch pieces
- ½ cup/120 grams crème fraîche, Greek yogurt or sour cream, at room temperature
- ½ cup/120 milliliters maple syrup
- ⅓ cup/80 milliliters buttermilk, at room temperature
- 1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
- 1 cup/125 grams fresh blueberries

For the glaze:

- ½ cup/60 grams confectioners' sugar
- 2-3 tablespoons maple syrup

1. In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, briefly mix both flours, the baking powder, baking soda and salt on low speed. Add half the butter, and paddle until fully mixed into the flour, 2-3 minutes. (This will coat the flour with butter so the scones are tender.)

2. Add the remaining butter to the bowl of the stand mixer. Pulse the mixer 3 or 4 times to mix the pieces into the dough while keeping them whole. (This step will give you small pieces of butter in the dough, which will help the scones be a bit flaky.)

3. In a small bowl, whisk together the crème fraîche, maple syrup, buttermilk and yolk until thoroughly mixed; stir in the blueberries. With the mixer on low, pour the blueberry mixture into the flour mixture, and paddle on low for about 10 seconds to get some of the liquid mixed into the flour. Stop the mixer, and mix the rest of the loose flour into the dough by hand: Gather and lift the dough with your hands and turn it over in the bowl several times until all the loose flour is mixed in. Shape the dough into a ball, wrap it well and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or for up to 1 day. (This gives the flour time to fully absorb the liquid.)

4. Heat the oven to 350, and position a rack in the center of the oven. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

5. Using a ½-cup measuring cup or ice cream scoop, scoop out 8 mounds of chilled dough, and place them on the baking sheet a few inches apart. Bake scones for 35-45 minutes, rotating the baking sheet midway through the baking time, until the scones are evenly golden brown and firm when you press them.

6. While the scones are baking, make the glaze: In a small bowl, whisk together the sugar and enough maple syrup to make a thick, spreadable glaze. Use immediately, or store in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 1 week; rewhisk before using.

7. As soon as you remove the scones from the oven, use a pastry brush to brush them with the glaze while they're warm. Let cool on the baking sheet for 30 minutes, then serve.

Yield: 8 scones.

Adapted from "Pastry Love," by Joanne Chang. ♦

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An artist of interiority in an age of public unrest.

By Jon Mooallem

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“ S O T H E Y R E Q

Charlie Kaufman asked.

Yes, I explained. I'd just received some discouraging feedback from the editors of this magazine about a draft of a story I turned in two weeks earlier. The story was a profile of him: Charlie Kaufman, the 61-year-old Oscar-winning screenwriter, known for films so rich with surreality and self-referential lunacy that they feel as if they might be spun apart by the force of their strangeness, yet miraculously cohere. (He first made his name in 1999 with “Being John Malkovich,” about a morose, avant-garde puppeteer who takes a temp job on the seventh-and-a-half floor of a Manhattan office building and discovers a dumbwaiter-shaped portal into the actor John Malkovich’s brain.) The occasion for the profile was the publication, on July 7, of Kaufman’s first novel, “Antkind,” a book that’s a half-foot thick and absolutely synopsis-resistant.

Our initial plan had been for me to fly to New York to interview him one Wednesday in March, but that plan evaporated when the nation’s first coronavirus outbreak started flaring near my home in Washington State. Instead, as I explained in my first draft of the story:

Kaufman and I quickly settled into a routine of talking on the phone every Wednesday, usually for an hour and a half or longer at a time. At least once, to be polite, I offered to give him a break, but Kaufman didn’t seem to want one. “The more we talk, the more I have a chance of saying something that’s not idiotic,” he said. Those phone calls were often the only entries on either of our calendars. It felt good to have them fixed there, dependably marking time.

Relatively quickly, the curve in my corner of the country started to flatten while the one in New York spiked, and Kaufman found himself somewhat dislocated at the epicenter of a pandemic. He only recently moved to Manhattan from Pasadena and was living alone in a temporary rental, still figuring things out. “How are you?” I would ask each week when he picked up the phone, and Kaufman would say, “I think I’m the same, but I’m always anticipating the next thing” or “I

“Being John Malkovich,” 1999



“Adaptation,” 2002

“Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” 2004





"Synecdoche, New York," 2008

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R E W R I T E S ? "

still seem to be avoiding getting sick, but who knows" or "Everything is threatening." One week he told me that he'd dropped his glasses on the floor in Whole Foods and couldn't bring himself to put them back on, even after washing them five times. ("What happens when your glasses break?" he asked. "What do you do?") And one week, when I asked how he was doing, he could only burst out laughing. And then I burst out laughing. Then Kaufman said, "How are you?" Then, after more laughing, the laughing died down and, very quietly, he told me, "I'm in a panic."

Eight weeks, this went on. It was a bizarre way to get to know a stranger, at a time when there was scant opportunity to discover anything new in life at all. A bond formed: not friendship, not therapy, but a kind of reciprocal Stockholm syndrome with qualities of both. "I wonder if you and I are ever going to meet after this intimate thing we've had," Kaufman asked during our final call on April 29.

"I've had that thought, too," I said. "It's strange the degree to which you've been the only real relationship in my life during this time, beyond my wife and kids." I had tried setting up weekly calls with family or friends, I told him, but nothing else stuck.

"Mine too, really," Kaufman said. Friends reached out, wanting to talk, but he usually felt too gloomy or anxious to engage. One guy, the previous week, had been uncommonly persistent, "and I finally had to text him back and say: 'I can't. I just can't.' But I couldn't do that with you," Kaufman told me. "That's been good for me. I've had to do it."

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The whole first draft read like that, more or less. It was slow-moving and a little weird. But given the disordered circumstances, I'd decided that the most honest approach was simply to write a portrait of one specific human being talking to another specific human being (me), to present a record of conversations that seemed to have been made more intimate by the dismaying stretch of time in which they took place. It was preposterous, but it almost felt as though Kaufman and I had somehow lived through that first phase of the pandemic together.

The problem was, in the two weeks since I'd turned in the story, hundreds of thousands of protesters had taken to the streets; things had taken an unmistakable, turbulent turn. What I heard my editors saying, and what I tried to explain to Kaufman now on the phone, was something I had sensed myself: The world was furious and roiling, and the profound introspection and "baroque interiority" of the piece I'd written (my editors' words) felt out of sync. Didn't that dissonance need to be resolved, or at



"Anomalisa," 2015

least acknowledged, in the story somehow? After receiving some (excuse me) slightly murky instructions about how that might be accomplished, I agreed to start by calling Kaufman back, to at least bring the chronology of our conversations up to date.

"They're saying it seems quaint at this point," Kaufman ventured. "But that's a bizarre thing in and of itself," he pointed out: how swiftly reality seemed to be shifting, the awkwardness of people's attempts to instantly react. "They want you to come back to talk to me because the piece doesn't have anything to do with the time we live in. If it *did* ever have anything to do with the time we live in" — and Kaufman was skeptical — "I think it's important to point out that that was two weeks ago!"

"I don't think that's exactly what they're saying," I said. "They're not saying it's irrelevant. ..." But I'm not sure this was totally honest. Everything except a small number of things did feel pretty irrelevant to me just then.

"It may be irrelevant!" Kaufman gladly interrupted. "I accept that it's irrelevant." It's why he had felt wary of doing the profile in the first place, he said. No part of him believed that he, as a person — not just his work — warranted this kind of attention. He'd written a book, and this profile was proposed, and it clearly seemed worth doing even if it made him uncomfortable. "At the time, it was fine, because I liked you, and it's been nice talking to you," he said. "But now, just because I wrote a book, are you going to have to keep coming back to me until July 5, or whenever this thing is published, for updates on the world? It's embarrassing," he said. "It's embarrassing to me."

I suddenly felt embarrassed, too. I was also angry at myself; my job required me to grapple with a problem with no obvious solution and, out

of weakness, I had foisted my confusion on him. Months earlier, when I set out to interview some of Kaufman's collaborators for this article, he declined to give me their contact information. The virus was tearing through New York and Los Angeles at the time, disrupting people's lives, ending people's lives, and Kaufman didn't feel comfortable helping me bother his friends and colleagues in the middle of all that, just so they could say nice things about him in *The New York Times*. It felt both wrong and shameful. Reminding him of that, I now told him, "So I'm not surprised that you find it embarrassing to have a big story written about you right now."

"Ever!" Kaufman said. "Ever! Like, ever!" But yes, that included right now. Moreover, the profile still wouldn't be published for another three weeks, and he and I both had been reading that morning about states blindly reopening and the explosion of new Covid-19 cases in Arizona, the hospitals overloading. It seemed the future would be different from the present. It always is.

"You know what this is like?" Kaufman went on. "You know the British documentary series that started with 'Seven Up'?" (Beginning in 1964, the filmmaker Michael Apted followed 14 children, revisiting them to document their lives every seven years; in the most recent installment, the subjects are all 63.) "That's what this is like, except it's seven weeks instead of years," Kaufman said. "And it's not even seven weeks, it's two weeks." And each time I called, the world, and his small, insignificant life within it, would have swerved unthinkably from last time. "I'm living in a trailer in the Scottish Highlands now," Kaufman said, laughing.

He was right. Time did seem to be compacting, I said. It felt like, at some point in the last few months, a truck backed up and started pumping years' worth of reality into every single week. The lever kept cranking, increasing the rate of flow.

On the other end of the phone: silence.

"Jon, you're breaking up," Kaufman said.

In my first draft of the story, there was a section dated Wednesday, April 15, that began like this:

"I didn't even know it was Wednesday when I got your email this morning," Kaufman said. "I was planning to go out, to go to the store." The grocery deliveries on which he'd been relying had stopped being reliable. Was the system caving in? The website said orders would now take a month to complete. I apologized, offered to call back later. But Kaufman didn't mean that he was too busy to talk. His point was: "I had no idea what day it was."

This was how most of those weeks felt: languorous and flat. Also, bewildering and fraught. Periodically, Kaufman would wind his way from some other subject into expressions of empathy, terror or indignation at the pain and governmental ineptitude unfolding in the world beyond his apartment. That sense of distance, he observed, gave a strange, new cast to those feelings. "It's all very weird," he pointed out. For those of us who weren't essential workers or touched personally by the virus, "this thing is largely virtual. It's disembodied." Every day he absorbed new information, but his mind struggled to settle on any confident interpretation of it. When New Yorkers started cheering for front-line health-care workers every evening, for example, Kaufman found it well intentioned, but he struggled to go along with it and feel uplifted. "There's a sentimentality to it that doesn't take into account the gross negligence of the government in making sure that these people are protected at their jobs," he said. "It's the equivalent of tweeting. When you're tweeting your support for people



Kaufman on the set of "I'm Thinking of Ending Things" last year with the actress Jessie Buckley.

who work in grocery stores or are delivering the products you buy, what is that getting them?" It wasn't a rhetorical question. *Was* it getting them something? He earnestly wanted to know.

In April, he busied himself a little, taking a job adapting a short story for Ryan Gosling's production company. Early on, Kaufman's college-age daughter came to stay with him, and they got in the habit of taking nine-mile walks around Manhattan and felting together, as they did when she was young. (At one point, Kaufman sent me a photo of one of his creations: a felt bust of Federico García Lorca.) But mostly, as he once explained, "I feel like I've been spinning my wheels and wasting my time and looking at stuff online that I shouldn't be. It's making me very anxious. I feel like I've got some kind of obligation that I'm not meeting right now, an obligation to do something, to not waste time — to find the world and not have it delivered to me."

"Antkind" had been finished for several months, as had a new film Kaufman wrote and directed, based on the novel by Iain Reid, "I'm Thinking of Ending Things," which will be out on Netflix this September — a phantasmagorical, tightly wound thriller about a young couple, played by Jesse Plemons and the Irish actress Jessie Buckley, driving through a snowstorm in Oklahoma. Kaufman was proud of the film, but called it "odd, small and a little complicated" and felt certain it would not produce any significant upswing for his career. "I honestly approached it as my last directing job."

Kaufman is in the curious position of being admired in Hollywood but also constantly thwarted by its business model. Somewhere along the line, his actual stature and the perception of it had slipped awkwardly out of alignment. (When an interviewer from *The Hollywood Reporter* asked Kaufman in 2016, "Would Charlie Kaufman ever consider doing television?" Kaufman replied, "Charlie Kaufman has tried.") After a trio of his earliest films, "Being John Malkovich," "Adaptation" and "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" earned him three Oscar nominations and one win, he accumulated enough clout to direct one of his own scripts for the first time: "Synecdoche, New York," starring Philip Seymour Hoffman as a theater director whose warped ambition leads him to build (somehow) a full-scale replica of Manhattan inside a warehouse in Manhattan, which includes (somehow) a replica of the warehouse, which contains (somehow) another Manhattan inside it. "Synecdoche" came out in the fall of 2008, when the economy was in free fall. Roger Ebert called it "the best film of the decade," but commercially, it was not a success. Then the film industry rapidly contracted and turned risk-averse. The big studios Kaufman

had worked with, like Sony, no longer seemed interested in greenlighting the kind of midbudget, idiosyncratic films he wanted to write and direct.

"I have a lot of things that could spark, but won't," he told me one of the first times we spoke. He spent nearly a decade seeking financing for a script he wrote called "Frank or Francis," a musical about an internet troll's deranged feud with a film director that included 50 original songs. The only way a studio would let Kaufman direct it, he was told, was if he loaded it with movie stars. So he got Steve Carrell and Jack Black attached. Also Cate Blanchett, Nicolas Cage, Emma Thompson, Kevin Kline, Elizabeth Banks and Catherine Keener. But still, it wasn't enough. He developed ideas for television, then watched them founder. He took jobs to pay his mortgage, including an uncredited rewrite on "Kung Fu Panda 2." In 2015, he co-directed the critically exalted, stop-animation film "Anomalisa," with Duke Johnson, based on a script Kaufman wrote for a live radio play — but only after Johnson's company raised the initial chunk of the project's budget on Kickstarter. And in all that time, Kaufman made a point of being disarmingly transparent with the press about the obstacles he met with, which the press at times overemphasized, much to his embarrassment.

(New York Magazine, 2016: "Charlie Kaufman Is Having a Pretty Depressing Existential Crisis: 'I Wonder If It's Not Cool or Sexy to Be in Business With Me.'")

When a book editor first approached Kaufman, in 2011, asking if he'd ever thought about writing a novel, he recognized how liberating that might be. Whatever he chose to write wouldn't have to be filmed or budgeted, or screened for a test audience, or tweaked to get a particular rating. If he wanted to write about an army of animatronic Donald Trumps, known as "Trunks," or place a new mountain range in the middle of North America, he could. And if he wanted his protagonist to have sexual intercourse with that mountain range, he could do that, too. And more than that: He *had* to do it. Though he hadn't seriously written prose in 40 years, and kept imagining critics punishing him for his ineptitude, or just his audacity for trying something new, he took the same approach that he does with his screenplays. Ideas that came up that felt like "Oh, you absolutely can't do *that*" — those were the ideas that Kaufman forced himself toward. "I have to put myself in a position to fail ridiculously," he said.

This was never clearer to me than when he talked about writing "Adaptation." In short: Kaufman signed on to adapt "The Orchid Thief," by Susan Orlean — a delicate, wide-ranging, meditative book about orchids, loosely centered on the story of an oddball Floridian plant poacher but without any hint of conventional plot — precisely because he had no idea how it could be done. After spending months in an "overwhelming depression" over the project, as he put it, he finally stepped back from the source material to consider what was preoccupying him at that moment in his own life, hoping to find something that felt alive, or sufficiently kinetic, to push him forward. And what was preoccupying him was obvious: "This idea occurred to me," he says, "and it opened things up."

In the end, "Adaptation" centered on the screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, struggling to adapt "The Orchid Thief." In one of the first scenes, we see Nicolas Cage, as Kaufman, flop-sweating at lunch with a befuddled Hollywood executive, waving a copy of Orlean's book in the air and ranting about how he doesn't want to "cram in sex or guns or car chases, or characters learning profound life lessons ... or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end. The book isn't like that," he insists, and "life isn't like that. It just isn't." It was precisely what the real Kaufman explained to a real Hollywood executive before taking the job.

Discussing Kaufman's creative process in my first draft, I described him as essentially constructing tortuous escape rooms for himself, then writing his way out. This approach seemed to cause him so much suffering that I eventually asked him:

"Is there any part of you that feels afflicted by your convictions?" Did he ever just wish he could write an action film or something? "There's no part of you that wishes it were easier?"

"I would like to have money that I don't have," he replied, "and I tell myself that I could write a commercial blockbuster." But he also understood that he might be flattering himself; he'd never actually tried. He was proud of his commitment to do original, meaningful work. "There's lots and lots of garbage out there that isn't honest and isn't trying to help clarify or explore the human condition in any way," he told me, "and it sends people down the wrong road" — skews our perceptions of our own lives, and each other — "and it's mind-numbing and it's toxic, and I don't want to have that on my résumé. I don't even mean my professional résumé, but my résumé as a human being."

P S I K E J O N Z E , W H O

directed both "Adaptation" and "Being John Malkovich," compared Kaufman to Kanye West — albeit haltingly and with a number of disclaimers. "This is a weird comparison," Jonze told me, "and I hesitate to bring him up because everyone has an opinion about this person, but. ..." Jonze and West have been friends and collaborators for 15 years, he said, almost as long as Jonze has been a friend and collaborator of Kaufman's. "And the thing about Kanye is," Jonze said, "it's not that Kanye doesn't care what people think about him. It hurts his feelings if he's misunderstood, like anybody. But he can't not be himself. He has no choice in the matter. And I think Charlie's the same way."

Jonze stuttered a bit, then added: "Again, I hesitate to make the comparison. They're so different in every other way." Then he was quiet for a moment, a long moment, searching for another way to capture it.

To be fair, almost everyone I interviewed for this article appeared to struggle to express what they admired about Kaufman. The actress Jessie Buckley told me, "I guess the thing with Charlie is that he's the most human kind of otherworldly kind of Greek god I've" (Continued on Page 47)

*Our founding ideals promise
liberty and equality for all.
Our reality is an enduring
racial hierarchy that
has persisted for centuries.*



We saw a man face down on the pavement, p
man, a man in uniform, his skin lighter than t
man was bearing down on the darker man, hi
man, the lighter man's hands at his sides, in h
were so nonchalantly in his pockets? — such
of embedded entitlement with which he was

We heard the man on the ground pleading with the man above him, saw the terror in his face, heard his gasps for air, heard the anguished cries of an unseen chorus, begging the lighter man to stop. But the lighter man, the dominant man, looked straight at the bystanders, into the camera, and thus at all of us around the world who would later bear witness and, instead of heeding the cries of the chorus, pressed his knee deeper into the darker man's neck as was the perceived right granted him in the hierarchy. The man on the ground went silent, drained of breath. A clear liquid crept down the pavement. We saw a man die before our very eyes.

What we did not see, not immediately anyway, was the invisible scaffolding, a caste system with ancient rules and assumptions that made such a

This article is adapted from Isabel Wilkerson's forthcoming book, "Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents."

horror possible, that held each actor in that scene in its grip. Off camera, two other men in uniform, who looked like the lighter man, were holding down the darker man from the other side of the police car as dusk approached in Minneapolis. Yet another man in uniform, of Asian descent and thus not in the dominant caste, stood near, watching, immobilized, it seemed, at a remove from his own humanity and potential common cause, as the darker man slipped out of consciousness. We soon learned that the man on the ground, George Floyd, had been accused of trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill, and, like uncountable black men over the centuries, lost his life over what might have been a mere citation for people in the dominant caste.

In the weeks leading up to the country's commemoration of its founding, protests and uprisings took hold in cities in every state, in Bakersfield, Charleston, Buffalo, Poughkeepsie, Wichita,

Boise, Sioux Falls. Protesters tore down a statue of Christopher Columbus in St. Paul, Minn. They toppled a statue of Jefferson Davis in Richmond, Va. And the country was forced to contemplate the observation of Frederick Douglass a century and a half before: "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?" What, we might ask in our day, is freedom to those still denied it as their country celebrates its own?

AN OLD HOUSE AND AN INFRARED LIGHT

The inspector trained his infrared lens onto a misshapen bow in the ceiling, an invisible beam

inned beneath a car, and above him another
he man on the ground, and the lighter
s knee boring into the neck of the darker
is pockets — could it be that his hands
was the ease and casual calm, the confidence
able to lord over the darker man.

of light searching the layers of lath to test what the eye could not see. This house was built generations ago, and I had noticed the slightest welt in a corner of plaster in a spare bedroom and chalked it up to idiosyncrasy. Over time, the welt in the ceiling became a wave that widened and bulged despite the new roof. It had been building beyond perception for years. An old house is its own kind of devotional, a dowager aunt with a story to be coaxed out of her, a mystery, a series of interlocking puzzles awaiting solution. Why is this soffit tucked into the southeast corner of an eave? What is behind this discolored patch of brick? With an old house, the work is never done, and you don't expect it to be.

America is an old house. We can never declare the work over. Wind, flood, drought and human upheavals batter a structure that is already fighting whatever flaws were left

unattended in the original foundation. When you live in an old house, you may not want to go into the basement after a storm to see what the rains have wrought. Choose not to look, however, at your own peril. The owner of an old house knows that whatever you are ignoring will never go away. Whatever is lurking will fester whether you choose to look or not. Ignorance is no protection from the consequences of inaction. Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see.

We in this country are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say: "I had nothing to do with

how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves." And yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures in the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now.

And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.

Unaddressed, the ruptures and diagonal cracks will not fix themselves. The toxins will not go away but rather will spread, leach and mutate, as they already have. When people live in an old house, they come to adjust to the idiosyncrasies and outright dangers skulking in an old structure. They



put buckets under a wet ceiling, prop up groaning floors, learn to step over that rotting wood tread in the staircase. The awkward becomes acceptable, and the unacceptable becomes merely inconvenient. Live with it long enough, and the unthinkable becomes normal. Exposed over the generations, we learn to believe that the incomprehensible is the way that life is supposed to be.

In my own house, the inspector was facing the mystery of the misshapen ceiling, and so he first held a sensor to the surface to detect if it was damp. The reading inconclusive, he then pulled out the infrared camera to take a kind of X-ray of whatever was going on, the idea being that you cannot fix a problem until and unless you can see it. He could now see past the plaster, beyond what had been wallpapered or painted over, as we now are called upon to do in the house we all live in, to examine a structure built long ago.

Like other old houses, America has an unseen skeleton: its caste system, which is as central to its operation as are the studs and joists that we cannot see in the physical buildings we call home. Caste is the infrastructure of our divisions. It is the architecture of human hierarchy, the subconscious code of instructions for maintaining, in our case, a 400-year-old social order. Looking at caste is like holding the country's X-ray up to the light.

A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant caste, whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranks apart, distinct from one another and in their assigned places.

Throughout human history, three caste systems have stood out. The lingering, millenniums-long caste system of India. The tragically accelerated, chilling and officially vanquished caste system of Nazi Germany. And the shape-shifting, unspoken, race-based caste pyramid in the United States. Each version relied on stigmatizing those deemed inferior to justify the dehumanization necessary to keep the lowest-ranked people at the bottom and to rationalize the protocols of enforcement. A caste system endures because it is often justified as divine will, originating from sacred text or the presumed laws of nature, reinforced throughout the culture and passed down through the generations.

As we go about our daily lives, caste is the wordless usher in a darkened theater, flashlight cast down in the aisles, guiding us to our assigned seats for a performance. The hierarchy of caste is not about feelings or morality. It is about power — which groups have it and which do not. It is about resources — which groups are seen as worthy of them and which are not, who gets to acquire and control them and who does not. It is about respect,

authority and assumptions of competence — who is accorded these and who is not.

As a means of assigning value to entire swaths of humankind, caste guides each of us often beyond the reaches of our awareness. It embeds into our bones an unconscious ranking of human characteristics and sets forth the rules, expectations and stereotypes that have been used to justify brutalities against entire groups within our species. In the American caste system, the signal of rank is what we call race, the division of humans on the basis of their appearance. In America, race is the primary tool and the visible decoy for caste.

Race does the heavy lifting for a caste system that demands a means of human division. If we have been trained to see humans in the language of race, then caste is the underlying grammar that we encode as children, as when learning our mother tongue. Caste, like grammar, becomes an invisible guide not only of how we speak but also of how we process information, the autonomic calculations that figure into a sentence without our having to think about it.

Many of us have never taken a class in grammar, yet we know in our bones that a transitive verb takes an object, that a subject needs a predicate; we know without thinking the difference between third-person singular and third-person plural. We may mention "race," referring to people as black or white or Latino or Asian or indigenous, when what lies beneath each label is centuries of history and assigning of assumptions and values to physical features in a structure of human hierarchy.

What people look like, or rather, the race they have been assigned or are perceived to belong to, is the visible cue to their caste. It is the historic flashcard to the public of how they are to be treated, where they are expected to live, what kinds of positions they are expected to hold, whether they belong in this section of town or that seat in a boardroom, whether they should be expected to speak with authority on this or that subject, whether they will be administered pain relief in a hospital, whether they are more or less likely to survive childbirth in the most advanced nation in the world, whether they may be shot by the authorities with impunity.

We know that the letters of the alphabet are neutral and meaningless until they are combined to make a word, which itself has no significance until it is inserted into a sentence and interpreted by those who speak or hear it. In the same way that "black" and "white" were applied to people who were literally neither, but rather gradations of brown and beige and ivory, the caste system sets people at poles from one another and attaches meaning to the extremes, and to the gradations in between, and then reinforces those meanings, replicates them in the roles each caste was and is assigned and permitted or required to perform.

And yet, in recent decades, we have learned from the human genome that all human beings

are 99.9 percent the same. "Race is a social concept, not a scientific one," said J. Craig Venter, the genomics expert who ran Celera Genomics when the initial sequencing was completed in 2000. "We all evolved in the last 100,000 years from the small number of tribes that migrated out of Africa and colonized the world." Which means that an entire racial caste system, the catalyst of hatreds and civil war, was built on what the anthropologist Ashley Montagu called "an arbitrary and superficial selection of traits," derived from a tiny fraction of the tens of thousands of genes that make up a human being. "The idea of race," Montagu wrote, "was, in fact, the deliberate creation of an exploiting class seeking to maintain and defend its privileges against what was profitably regarded as an inferior social caste."

Caste and race are neither synonymous nor mutually exclusive. They can and do coexist in the same culture and serve to reinforce each other. Race, in the United States, is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste. Caste is the bones, race the skin. Race is what we can see, the physical traits that have been given arbitrary meaning and become shorthand for who a person is. Caste is the powerful infrastructure that holds each group in its place. Its very invisibility is what gives it power and longevity. And though it may move in and out of consciousness, though it may flare and reassert itself in times of upheaval and recede in times of relative calm, it is an ever-present through line in the country's operation.

Caste is rigid and deep; race is fluid and superficial, subject to periodic redefinition to meet the needs of the dominant caste in what is now the United States. While the requirements to qualify as white have changed over the centuries, the fact of a dominant caste has remained constant from its inception — whoever fit the definition of white, at whatever point in history, was granted the legal rights and privileges of the dominant caste. Perhaps more critical and tragic, at the other end of the ladder, the subordinated caste, too, has been fixed from the beginning as the psychological floor beneath which all other castes cannot fall.

Thus we are all born into a silent war game, centuries old, enlisted in teams not of our own choosing. The side to which we are assigned in the American system of categorizing people is proclaimed by the team uniform that each caste wears, signaling our presumed worth and potential. That any of us manages to create abiding connections across these manufactured divisions is a testament to the beauty of the human spirit.

AN AMERICAN UNTOUCHABLE

In the early winter of 1959, after leading the Montgomery bus boycott that arose from the

arrest of Rosa Parks and before the trials and triumphs to come, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta, landed in India, in the city then known as Bombay, to visit the land of Mohandas K. Gandhi, the father of non-violent protest. They were covered in garlands upon arrival, and King told reporters, "To other countries, I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim."

He had long dreamed of going to India, and they stayed for more than a month, welcomed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. King wanted to see for himself the place whose fight for freedom from British rule had inspired his fight for justice in America. He wanted to see the so-called untouchables, the lowest caste in the ancient Indian caste system, whom he had read of and had sympathy for, and who were left behind after India gained its independence the decade before.

He discovered that people in India had been following the trials of his own oppressed people in America, knew of the bus boycott he led. Wherever he went, people on the streets of Bombay and Delhi crowded around him for an autograph.

One afternoon, King and his wife journeyed to the southern tip of the country, to the city then known as Trivandrum in the state of Kerala, and visited with high school students whose families had been untouchables. The principal made the introduction.

"Young people," he said, "I would like to present to you a fellow untouchable from the United States of America."

King was floored. He had not expected that word to be applied to him. He was, in fact, put off by it at first. He had flown in from another continent, had dined with the prime minister. He did not see the connection, did not see what the Indian caste system had to do directly with him, did not immediately see why the lowest-caste people in India would view him, an American Negro and a distinguished visitor, as low-caste like themselves, see him as one of them.

"For a moment," he would later recall, "I was a bit shocked and peeved that I would be referred to as an untouchable."

Then he began to think about the reality of the lives of the people he was fighting for — 20 million people, consigned to the lowest rank in America for centuries, "still smothering in an airtight cage of poverty," quarantined in isolated ghettos, exiled in their own country.

And he said to himself, "Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable." In that moment, he realized that the Land of the Free had imposed a caste system not unlike the caste system of India and that he had lived under that system all his life. It was what lay beneath the forces he was fighting in America. He would later describe this awakening at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta in 1965 during his sermon for the Fourth of July.

"Caste" is not a word often applied to the United States. It is considered the language of India or feudal Europe. But some anthropologists and scholars of race in America have made use of the word for decades. Before the modern era, one of the earliest Americans to take up the idea of caste was the antebellum abolitionist and U.S. senator Charles Sumner as he fought against segregation in the North. "The separation of children in the Public Schools of Boston, on account of color or race," he wrote, "is in the nature of Caste, and on this account is a violation of Equality." He quoted a native of India: "Caste makes distinctions among creatures where God has made none."

of others have had to navigate to pursue our work and dreams.

THE R WORD

Once awakened to the underlying power of caste, we can better see the tool of race for what it is. What we face in our current day is not the classical racism of our ancestors' era but a mutation of the software that adjusts to the updated needs of the operating system.

As we go about our *daily lives*,
darkened theater, flashlight c
us to our *assigned seats* for a pe

What are the origins and workings of the hierarchy that intrudes upon the daily life and life chances of every American? That had intruded upon my own life with disturbing regularity and consequences? I wanted to understand the origins and evolution of classifying and elevating one group of people over another and the consequences of doing so to the presumed beneficiaries and to those targeted as beneath them. Moving about the world as a living, breathing caste experiment myself, I wanted to understand the hierarchies that I and many millions

In the half century since civil rights protests forced the United States to make state-sanctioned discrimination illegal, what Americans consider to be racism has shifted, and now the word is one of the most contentious and misunderstood in American culture. For many in the dominant caste, the word is radioactive — resented, feared, denied, lobbed back toward anyone who dares to suggest it. Resistance to the word often derails any discussion of the underlying behavior it is meant to describe, thus eroding it of meaning.

Social scientists often define racism as the combination of racial bias and systemic power, seeing racism, like sexism, as primarily the action of people or systems with personal or group power over another person or group with less power, as men have power over women, white people over people of color and the dominant over the subordinate.

But over time, racism has often been reduced to a feeling, a character flaw, conflated with prejudice, connected to whether one is a good person or not. It has come to mean overt and declared hatred of a person or group because of the race ascribed to them, a perspective few would ever own up to. While people will admit to

arrest brown immigrants en masse or display a Confederate flag but not be “certified” as a racist unless he or she confesses to it or is caught using derogatory signage or slurs? The instinctive desire to reject the very idea of current discrimination on the basis of a chemical compound in the skin is an unconscious admission of the absurdity of race as a concept.

With no universally agreed-upon definition, we might see racism as a continuum rather than an absolute. We might release ourselves of the purity test of whether someone is or is not racist and exchange that mind-set for one that sees people as existing on a scale based on the toxins they have absorbed from the polluted and

what people look like. Caste is a living, breathing entity. It is like a corporation that seeks to sustain itself at all costs. To achieve a truly egalitarian world requires looking deeper than what we think we see.

Caste is the granting or withholding of respect, status, honor, attention, privileges, resources, benefit of the doubt and human kindness to someone on the basis of their perceived rank or standing in the hierarchy. Caste pushes back against an African-American woman who, without humor or apology, takes a seat at the head of the table speaking Russian. It prefers an Asian-American man to put his technological expertise at the service of the company but not aspire to chief executive. Yet it sees as logical a white 16-year-old serving as store manager over employees from the subordinate caste three times his age. Caste is insidious and therefore powerful because it is not hatred; it is not necessarily personal. It is the worn grooves of comforting routines and unthinking expectations, patterns of a social order that have been in place for so long that it looks like the natural order of things.

What is the difference between racism and casteism? Because caste and race are interwoven in America, it can be hard to separate the two. Any action or institution that mocks, harms, assumes or attaches inferiority or stereotype on the basis of the social construct of race can be considered racism. Any action or structure that seeks to limit, hold back or put someone in a defined ranking, seeks to keep someone in their place by elevating or denigrating that person on the basis of their perceived category, can be seen as casteism.

Casteism is the investment in keeping the hierarchy as it is in order to maintain your own ranking, advantage or privilege or to elevate yourself above others or keep others beneath you. For those in the marginalized castes, casteism can mean seeking to keep those on your disfavored rung from gaining on you, to curry the favor and remain in the good graces of the dominant caste, all of which serve to keep the structure intact.

In the United States, racism and casteism frequently occur at the same time, or overlap or figure into the same scenario. Casteism is about positioning and restricting those positions, vis-à-vis others. What race and its precursor, racism, do extraordinarily well is to confuse and distract from the underlying structural and more powerful Sith lord of caste. Like the cast on a broken arm, like the cast in a play, a caste system holds everyone in a fixed place.

For this reason, many people — including those we might see as good and kind people — could be casteist, meaning invested in keeping the hierarchy as it is or content to do nothing to change it, but not racist in the classical sense, not active and openly hateful of this or that group. Actual racists, actual haters, would

(Continued on Page 49)

caste is the *wordless usher* in a *fast down* in the aisles, guiding performance.

or call out sexism or xenophobia or homophobia, people may immediately deflect accusations of racism, saying they don’t have “a racist bone in their body” or are the “least racist person you could ever meet,” that they “don’t see color,” that their “best friend is black,” and they may have even convinced themselves on a conscious level of these things.

What does racism mean in an era when even extremists won’t admit to it? What is the litmus test for racism? Who is racist in a society where someone can refuse to rent to people of color,

inescapable air of social instruction we receive from childhood.

Caste, on the other hand, predates the notion of race and has survived the era of formal state-sponsored racism long officially practiced in the mainstream. The modern-day version of easily deniable racism may be able to cloak the invisible structure that created and maintains hierarchy and inequality. But caste does not allow us to ignore structure. Caste is structure. Caste is ranking. Caste is the boundaries that reinforce the fixed assignments based upon

There's a video of the exact moment Inshaf Ibrahim decided to abandon his life as a rich young man and turn into a mass murderer. In one sense, he had made up his mind weeks earlier, which was why he was loitering in the Cinnamon Grand hotel's breakfast buffet on Easter Sunday last year in Colombo, strapped into a knapsack of explosives. Once he arrived, though, he appeared to dither. Later, investigators picked him out of CCTV footage, standing near a vacant table, wearing a baseball cap and a T-shirt, his back to the camera. In the footage, he moves like a perplexed penguin. Two steps forward, half a step back, a turn, another turn: a choreography of hesitation. Perhaps he is reconsidering? But no, the investigators concluded; he is waiting for more people to come in. Finally, a microsecond of stillness, arms heavy by his side; then his hands reach toward the front of his waist, and the film goes dark.

The restaurant, Taprobane, was one level below the lobby, so when a hotel employee on the same floor heard the muffled boom, he thought something must have fallen into the dining room, possibly a chandelier. When he got closer to the scene, he saw smoke and people carrying out bodies. He asked what happened, but no one had time to talk. A fire, he figured. Then he entered the restaurant, saw the devastation and revised his guess: gas explosion. On his phone, he has a video he shot: the glass windows overlooking the garden blown out, ceiling panels ripped away, the omelet stations pulverized. "Some of the foreign guests were bigger than us, so we had to put them onto banquet tables and carry them out, four to a table," he told me.

After the bodies — 20 of them — had been cleared, the employee went back in with the police. "That was when I saw the head of the bugger," he recalled. "I knew it was a suicide bomber. We all know that if a bomber blows up a bomb on his torso, you'll find his head separately."

Sri Lanka has a long, morbid familiarity with suicide bombing. During a civil war that lasted from 1983 to 2009, the guerrillas of the Tamil Tigers used the tactic extensively, trying to compel the government to grant the island's Tamil-speaking minority its own nation. Men and women in suicide boats, ramming into naval ships; in suicide vests, assassinating presidents and prime ministers; in a suicide plane, hurtling into a government building; in suicide trucks stuffed with explosives, driving into a Buddhist temple in Kandy, the World Trade

FAMILY SECRETS

Why did two sons of a wealthy Muslim spice trader help carry out the worst suicide bombings Sri Lanka has ever seen?

By *Samanth Subramanian*

Photographs by *Mahesh Shantaram*



The Cinnamon Grand hotel in Colombo, where Inshaf Ibrahim detonated a bomb in a restaurant in April 2019.

Center in Colombo and the Central Bank down the road from the Cinnamon Grand.

Even so, Easter Sunday came as an incomparable shock. The Tigers had never pulled off an attack so audacious and meticulous. Ibrahim was one of eight bombers who struck across Sri Lanka that morning. His associates attacked two other hotels; his younger brother, Ilham, was one of two human bombs at the Shangri-La. Others detonated themselves in churches in and around Colombo and in the eastern town of Batticaloa, just when the faithful had assembled for Easter Mass. Two hundred sixty-nine people were killed in all. Their bodies were left in so many pieces that, at first, the authorities thought the death toll to be at least 350.

Everything about Easter Sunday was confounding: the scale of the destruction, coordinated under the nose of Sri Lanka's security apparatus; the selection of churches as targets, even though Christians, who make up just 7.4 percent of the population, have never fallen neatly on either side of Sri Lanka's various communal divides; and ISIS's claim upon these attacks two days later, complete with the obligatory video of the eight men swearing allegiance to the caliphate's chief at the time, Abu Bakr

al-Baghdadi— even though ISIS wasn't known to have a foothold in Sri Lanka.

Easter Sunday turned out to be the most horrific example of ISIS's successful franchising of terrorism — worse than the siege in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2016, or the shooting in San Bernardino, Calif., in 2015, or the Bataclan attack in Paris that same year. The bombings surprised Bruce Hoffman, a longtime scholar of terrorism and insurgency at Georgetown University, both because they were planned amid heavy ISIS losses in Iraq and Syria and because the bombers, such nobodies, were able to build and detonate these sophisticated explosives. They proved that small cells can now operate with the capacities of established groups, Hoffman says, and that these franchise attacks will continue without any direct supervision from ISIS headquarters — even after the United States killed al-Baghdadi last October. Such strikes, he says, “can be carried out on the ground by locals, if they're determined and frustrated enough.”

In this respect, the Ibrahim brothers flouted all expectation. Many Muslims have suffered in Sri Lanka: targeted by the Tigers in the 1990s, or by Buddhist extremists over the past decade. Not the Ibrahims; the country was good to them. Their father, Yusuf Mohamed Ibrahim, came to Colombo as a boy from a village in the hills and, by becoming one of Sri Lanka's leading spice exporters, built a fortune, owning land all over Colombo.

Inshaf, who was 36, worked in his father's company and then set up his own, to refine and export scrap copper. He lived with his wife and four children in downtown Colombo and was considered a consummate success. Ilham, who was 33, didn't want to work and didn't have to. His family lived with his parents in a plush pocket of bungalows called Mahawila Gardens. The Ibrahim residence was the grandest on the street; one neighbor told me she called it “the palace.” On the afternoon of Easter Sunday, when the police raided the house, Ilham's wife, Fatima, flipped the switch on her own suicide vest, killing herself and their three children. She was expecting a fourth.

Of all the bombers, these two young men proved the most baffling to other Sri Lankans. There have always been well-off terrorists, even wealthy ones. Still, when new examples emerge, they force us to re-examine a tenet of modern life: our belief that security and economic comforts are the rudiments of a peaceful community, and that people turn against strangers only when they face some material peril or privation. Most of us associate violence with desperation. What did the Ibrahim brothers have to be desperate about?

Two days after the bombings, Sri Lanka declared a state of emergency, allowing its Criminal Investigation Department to arrest whomever it liked without a warrant and hold detainees indefinitely. Until the emergency was lifted, on Aug. 22, the country was dangerous for anyone who admitted to knowing any of the bombers, or indeed for any Muslim at all. Nearly 300 people were arrested, among them Muslims who owned a suspicious number of SIM cards, or had a Quran, or wore a caftan printed with what looked like the sacred wheel of Buddhism. It wasn't just the state that lashed out. Not far from Colombo, Muslims were attacked by vigilante mobs. In November, Sri Lanka elected as president a former defense chief



The Shangri-La Hotel (right) in Colombo, where Inshaf Ibrahim's younger brother, Ilham, detonated a bomb the same morning.

named Gotabaya Rajapaksa, whose ruthlessness against minorities and dissidents prompted his own family to call him the Terminator. Under Rajapaksa, a spate of new arrests ensued — including, in April, that of Hejaaz Hizbullah, a lawyer who has represented Mohamed Ibrahim in some of his business affairs.

When I was in Colombo last August, some of the Ibrahims were still in detention for questioning. The others were soon released, but the father remains in custody, so I couldn't reach him: he could be held for up to 18 months without charges under an antiterrorism law. The last time he was seen in public was at the time of his arrest, outside his house. A photograph showed a stocky man of 65, with close-cropped hair and a spray of gray beard. He wore a white sarong, a blue T-shirt and a look of bewilderment. His feet were bare, as if his slippers had fallen through the gulf that had opened between his old and new worlds.

Everyone called him Hajjar — one who has performed the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Hajjar was a man of plain habits, the kind of millionaire who, if his car was unavailable, was happy to hail a trishaw to go to his office: Ishana Exports, 37 Old Moor Street. A three-floor building done up in smooth red and cream, Ishana looked nothing like other structures in Pettah, the commercial heart of old Colombo. Pettah lies just outside the walls of the city's first colonial fort, constructed by the Portuguese in 1518, and its lanes are jammed with handcarts, trishaws and small trucks delivering vegetables, vendors selling sliced fruit and cars parked at brazen angles. Other buildings wear their age in their scabby, rain-damaged paint; Ishana was the sleek, prosperous beast in the pack.

One morning, I went to the store of another spice merchant, a relative of Hajjar's. He sat behind a glass-topped table with a phone and a calculator at hand. The floor was filled with open sacks and barrels of spices. The air was savory: cinnamon, black pepper, a hint of cardamom.

No names, he requested. You know the situation. You know what the political climate is like.

When Hajjar was 13, he left his village of Deltota for Colombo. His father married a second time after his first wife died, and Hajjar was the 17th of 18 children. They weren't well off, and a young man wishing to make the most of life had to seek the metropolis. In Colombo, Hajjar worked in a shop, earning 60 rupees a month cooking meals for the other employees. He got to know Pettah's vegetable vendors and quit his job to become a broker. "Onions, potatoes, things like that," the relative said. "He'd buy from here and sell there. For every sack, he made a two-rupee brokerage fee."

Hajjar invested his earnings in his first spice business, then moved to manage another and finally started Ishana in 1986. His representatives around the country bought spices, which Ishana shipped overseas: areca nuts to the Maldives, and pepper, cloves, nutmeg and mace to India. Hajjar built his company until a full third of Sri Lanka's black-pepper exports were going out with Ishana's name on the cargo manifests. In his business dealings, one of his associates told me, Hajjar had very few rules. He was the sort of guy you see in Tamil movies, the associate said: the rich man who came up the hard way. "He has a lot of money, a lot of influence. He massages the system, and he massages it for the good of other people as well." At its peak, Ishana exported 250 full shipping containers in a year, one of Hajjar's managers told me. Its revenues touched eight billion rupees, or more than \$40 million. In Sri Lanka, where the per capita income is around 660,000

rupees, the Ibrahims became wealthy beyond the dreams of little Deltota.

When Ishana was still a fledgling enterprise, Hajjar lived alone in Colombo. He had married a woman named Kadija from Welamboda, another hill-country village. An *appavi*, Hajjar's relative called her: a naïf. They started a family — they would have nine children — but it wasn't until the early 1990s that they left Welamboda for Hajjar's tiny apartment above the store on Old Moor Street.

No one I spoke to seemed to have quite worked out how to discuss Inshaf and Ilham. What could they say about these men they thought they had known? Instead, they talked up Hajjar, heaping praise on his philanthropy. I heard from a neighbor about how, during Ramadan one year, he ran into Hajjar in the Maligawatta market. "He was saying, 'Ten kilograms of beef to this mosque; 10 kilograms to that mosque,' and I wondered how much he was spending." I heard from his relative, the spice merchant, about how when parts of Colombo flooded, Hajjar didn't care that millions of rupees' worth of his spices were submerged. "He didn't even go to the warehouse," the relative said. "He was here, packing parcels of food and distributing them to the poor." These stories were true, but they were delivered with anxious eagerness, as though the people who knew Hajjar were straining to offer compensation for the sins of his sons.

One beneficiary of Hajjar's generosity was the Colombo Grand Mosque, a polygonal structure with a golden dome, on the next street over from Ishana. From 2015 to 2018, Hajjar served on the mosque's board. He didn't always make it to the monthly meetings, but he was a ready source of funds, the mosque's vice president, Thawfeek Zuhar, told me. "If we needed 25,000 rupees or whatever — for electricity bills or other matters of finances — whenever we fell short, he'd just pay."

The Grand Mosque is Sri Lanka's oldest. When the Portuguese arrived in 1505, it is said, the mosque had already been there for the better part of a millennium. Arabian traders had visited and settled on the island since before the birth of Islam, and the Moors — as these traders and their descendants came to be called — married into the local population. They spoke Tamil as a practical language for trading with South India and became the engine of Sri Lankan commerce. Traveling through colonial Pettah in 1850, an Englishman named Henry Charles Sirr was impressed by "the Moormen" who owned a string of shops and warehouses. "Every imaginable commodity is here to be procured," Sirr wrote, "from a lady's bonnet to a ship's anchor, from a paper of pins to a marlin-spike, from a bottle of pickles to a saddle, from a web of fine muslin to strong canvas for sails."

Despite their long residence, Muslims always inhabited an interstitial space in Sri Lanka's demography. The island's most prominent social divide is a linguistic one, although ethnicity and religion map closely onto language. Seven out of 10 Sri Lankans are Buddhist, and they all speak Sinhalese, just as all the Hindus speak Tamil; Christianity cuts across both language groups. Within this mosaic, Muslims are a tile set askew. They make up



The Ibrahim family mansion in the Mahawila Gardens section of Colombo. Ilham's wife, Fatima, detonated her own suicide vest here as the police were closing in.

9.7 percent of the populace — not the main minority but a secondary one. Their first language is Tamil, so they can never be considered Sinhalese, and because they trace their ancestry to Arab countries rather than India, they're also held apart from ethnic Tamils. Appropriately, the journalist Latheef Farook titled his book about Sri Lankan Muslims "Nobody's People."

As a result, Muslims have been burned from both directions. During the civil war, they tried to maintain a low profile, until they were judged untrustworthy by the Tigers. In 1990, in the northern towns the Tigers held, Muslims were told to leave, sometimes with just a few hours' notice. In the east, where the Tigers also held territory, the guerrillas surrounded two mosques during Friday prayers on an August evening the same year, shooting the men and boys inside, killing 147 worshippers. After the Tigers were defeated in 2009, Sri Lanka's newly emboldened Buddhist nationalists trained their violence upon Muslims. Right-wing groups attacked Muslim-owned shops, painted pigs on the walls of mosques and tore down a shrine to an Islamic saint. In 2014 and 2018, riots erupted in different parts of the country, during which Muslims and their properties were targeted. The violence spread so fast that it seemed as if some groups needed only the flimsiest excuse — a WhatsApp rumor of an incident miles away — to torch or loot the nearest Muslim business.

From the precariousness of their place in society, Muslims drew some axioms on how to be model citizens. *Stay on the good side of the state. Be moderate* — something that was, in any case, second nature to Sri Lanka's Muslims, many of whom follow the softened, syncretic customs of Sufism. *Keep tightly within your community. Give plentifully.* Just as Hajjar followed the mercantile tradition of generations of Muslims before him, so too did he abide by their collective wisdom on how to live as a Muslim in Sri Lanka.

Mahawila Gardens is laid out like a tuning fork, and the Ibrahims lived on the northern tine, in a chalk-white three-story mansion with steel-railed balconies. On a weekday morning last August, the house was mute and vacant; black-and-yellow caution tape ran from a sapling on one side of the road to a drainage pipe on the other, so that nobody could pass in front of the building. A lone policeman was on duty, and we stood together and gazed at

the house. There must be 10 rooms in there, he said, or maybe a dozen. He pointed to a window in the middle floor. That was where Fatima triggered her bomb, killing not just herself and her children but three policemen as well. A wooden shutter was hanging by a single hinge; in the next row of windows, the glass was shattered. The white BMW parked in front was smudged with soot. It seemed inconceivable that anyone would wish to return to sponge down the car, repair the windows and begin to live here again.

Hajjar and his wife raised three daughters and six sons in this house, and I met one of them: a young man with an unfailingly polite manner, who asked not to be identified. He was worried about being pulled into detention for questioning, as others had been. He sat on the edge of his chair, as if the pain of the past few months wouldn't permit him the respite of leaning back. His wife, next to him, spoke very little, except when she couldn't contain herself.

The Ibrahims moved into their big white house in 1998, when Inshaf, the second-oldest of the children, was finishing high school at the prestigious D. S. Senanayake College. He was in the section of the school where lessons were taught in Tamil, his brother remembered. "So he didn't interact at all with the Sinhalese boys. Only when they played sports, probably." Ilham, the surly one, attended Alexor International College, a school with a higher proportion of Muslim pupils. They never had many friends, their brother said. "Just each other."

Others noticed this as well. Mahawila Gardens is home to several Muslim families, and every year for Avurudu, the Sri Lankan New Year, the young people threw a celebratory dinner. The Ibrahim boys never attended. Some thought they were proud of their wealth, or shy because of it. "Maybe they thought they wouldn't fit in," said one neighbor who lived down the road. "They were very self-conscious, not the kind to just let loose." And people remarked upon the differences in Inshaf and Ilham. Inshaf was good-looking and well built, a fine student, always ready with a courteous smile; Ilham was shorter and a bit chubby, not quite as smart and so reserved that even his father's employees thought him gruff. Everyone liked to say that they had known Inshaf and thought the world of him; everyone was quick to add that they hadn't known Ilham at all.

It wasn't that Hajjar was too strict. As his son said, wryly: "He was too busy to be strict. ... Even after he came home in the evening, he was on the phone a lot, talking to suppliers and so on." And it wasn't that the Ibrahims were pious in a misanthropic way. Kadija was a very religious woman, the neighbor remembered — barely seen outside the house, and when she was, her head was always covered. Their brother said that Ilham took after their mother but that Inshaf was "only a little more religious than average."

"They never smoked or drank," his wife said. "They never went to clubs. And no girls. They were real goodie-boys. They did nothing wrong — until they committed the worst crime of all."

Among the Ibrahims, Hajjar was the most gregarious. He told his children that he learned, when he first came to Colombo, how to interact with every type of person. *You have to be like a reed that can bend in difficult times and bounce back*, he told his sons. His custom was to sling an arm around the shoulders of the men he knew or worked with and walk through the streets of Pettah in this manner. On the top floor of his house, he built a hall where he held Ramadan dinners for all of Mahawila Gardens. When his children married, he hosted banquets where he served quail to his friends and family, and to the politicians and businessmen who invariably attended.

After school, Inshaf joined Ishana. He had Hajjar's mind, his sense of trade and money. When he was a teenager, he would buy watches — and once even a motorcycle — and sell them to his friends at a profit. Ten years ago, he married the daughter of a prominent Colombo jeweler. Then in 2012, he started a copper business called Colossus, which bought scrap metal at auction, in the form of disused telecom cables or electrical transformers. Colossus stripped out the copper and cast it into eight-millimeter tubes



Inshaf Ibrahim (right) with his father, Mohamed, at an awards ceremony in 2016.

for export. A manager at Ishana remembered Inshaf as a terrific boss. He would organize cricket tournaments for his staff: rent a ground, print team T-shirts and even go out to bat himself. He paid workers bonuses for their weddings or during Ramadan. But he was also prone to paternalistic self-righteousness. “We had an accountant, an older man,” the manager said. “He would drink. He would smoke heavily. He was a Muslim, but he didn’t go to the mosque. And he was always in debt.” Inshaf frequently gave this wayward man advice. Mend your life. Stop drinking. Find your way back to Islam.

Ilham married, too. “Fatima, I think, was a religious scholar,” his brother said.

His wife laughed scornfully. “She was *not* a scholar.”

“She’d memorized the Quran, though.”

It proved hard to put Ilham to work. He joined Ishana’s board, and Hajjar set him up in a shop in the town of Kegalle to buy pepper and cloves from local farmers. But he displayed faint enthusiasm for this job and contrived to be in Colombo most of the time. Then Hajjar bought him a pepper estate in the hills in Matale, and Ilham farmed it halfheartedly for a couple of years before giving it up. Hajjar installed him as the treasurer of a small nongovernmental organization he financed, but Ilham was eternally at loggerheads with his colleagues, and the organization had to hire an assistant treasurer to do Ilham’s work for him. He was “an absolute idiot,” one of Hajjar’s associates said of Ilham. Hajjar was at his wits’ end trying to socialize Ilham, “because I think he realized there was something wrong with this son.”

But what that was, nobody could quite diagnose. Even as Inshaf and Ilham transformed over the last five years, those closest to them felt mystified by their newly severe religiosity. Their brother heard about the Easter Sunday attacks while he was out, and a friend called to tell him that there had been trouble in Mahawila Gardens. He called his father, but there was no reply, so he went to a relative’s house nearby, just in time to watch on television as the police surrounded his family’s home. Perhaps some of the terrorists had gone on the run and holed up inside the house, he reasoned. Then, he said, he saw the news about Inshaf and Ilham. He shook his head, nearly speechless with despair. “I’m so angry with them,” he said. “They were traitors. We came up because of this country, and they destroyed it.”

One afternoon, an employee rolled open the shutters to the Ishana office — then, as now, closed indefinitely after the bombings — and took me in. Everything smelled musty; the air-conditioning hadn’t been switched on in so long that its remote control had to be thumped to make it work. In the office, with its weak fluorescent lights and closed shutters, it could have been any hour of the day. We sat in Hajjar’s cabin on the ground floor, next to a rack of prizes he’d collected for his company. I remembered that one of the few photos of Inshaf to emerge in the press showed him in a sharp gray suit, accepting an award on Ishana’s behalf from a government minister. The two men are shaking hands; behind them stands Hajjar, beaming.

Four years ago, Inshaf and Ilham started to learn Arabic in Ishana’s conference room, sitting around the long table with a tutor every Saturday. Arabic, they believed, brought them closer to the Prophet, by enabling them to read the Quran in its original language. The classes featured a third student: Abdul Latheef Jameel Mohamed, the younger brother of one of the Ibrahims’ neighbors in Mahawila Gardens. Jameel always wore a lush beard and a *jubba*, a long tunic favored by Muslim men in the Middle East.

After attending college in England, Jameel went home to Sri Lanka in 2006, then moved to Melbourne for a postgraduate degree. During his four years there, he became such an extremist that Australian counterterrorism authorities investigated him for suspected links to ISIS. He returned to Colombo a scold, telling off his family for not being sufficiently religious, for failing to abolish music from their lives. He once persuaded his brother Hakeem, a tea trader, to take him and another friend to



**Mohamed Ibrahim's
Ishana Exports building
in Colombo.**

Turkey, where Hakeem was attending an exposition. In Turkey, Jameel’s friend vanished — absorbed into ISIS in Syria, Sri Lankan intelligence later learned. After that, some members of Colombo’s Muslim community warned the Criminal Investigation Department about Jameel. The C.I.D. put Jameel on a watch list. If you were to get hold of CCTV footage from near Jameel’s house, a source with knowledge of the investigation told me, you would see the C.I.D.’s undercover department in action. The same people always seemed to be hanging around Mahawila Gardens: a man hawking lottery tickets but never really interested in selling any, or beggars keeping an eye on the house.

Jameel was an eloquent fellow, prone to argument, said one person who spoke to him often. He told me that Jameel considered any Muslim who accepted the Sri Lankan legal system to be a *kafir*, a nonbeliever. One of his pet themes was the vulnerability of Muslims in Sri Lanka, and when riots against Muslims occurred, they stoked his outrage. The notion that the legal system will protect you is nonsense, he would declare. So was the very idea of human rights and due process.

An intelligence official, who was newly retired when I met him and asked not to be named because he was speaking

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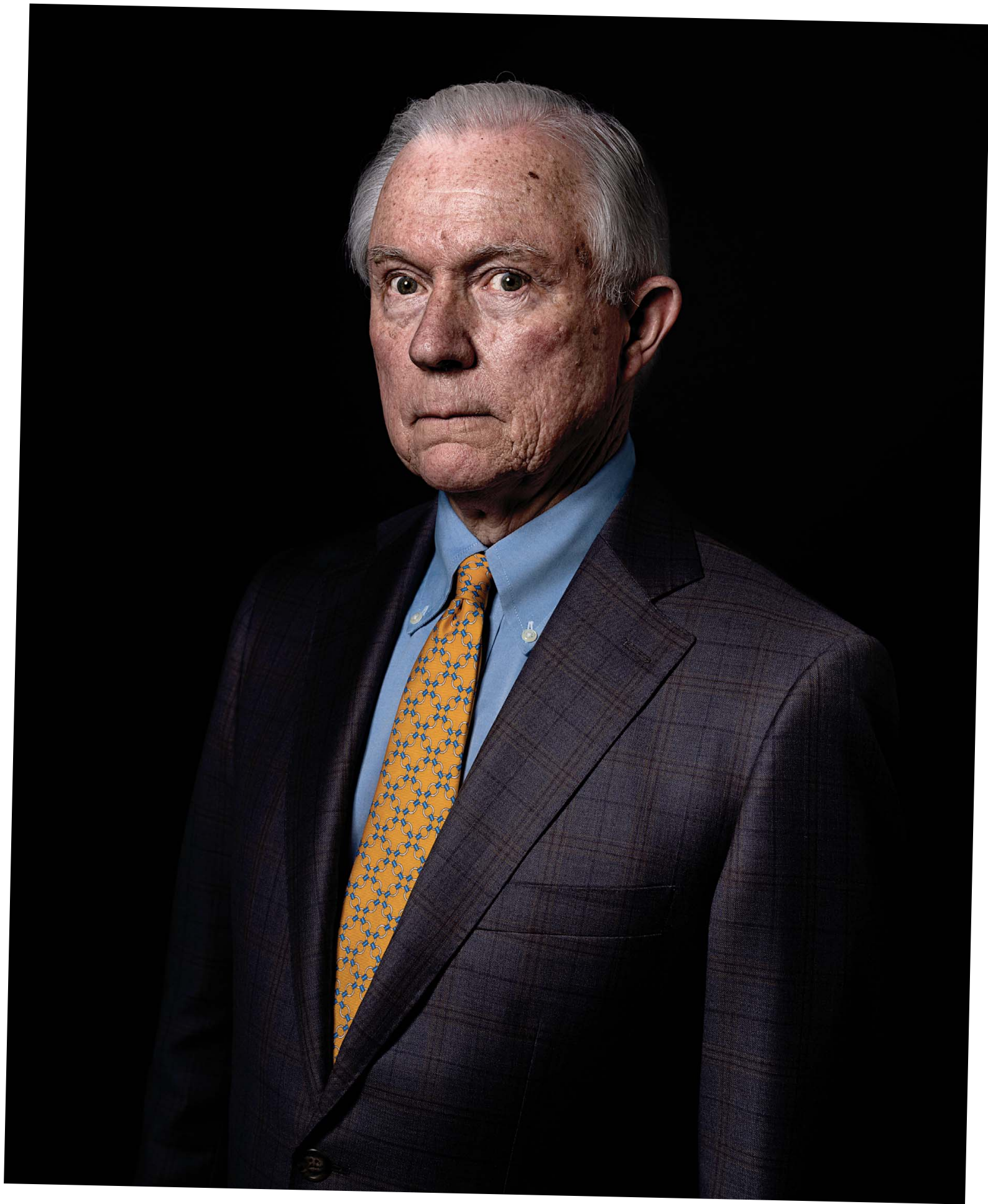
JEFF

SESSIONS,

AND

WHAT

CAME AFTER



Photograph by Joshua Rashaad McFadden

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS

before he fired Jeff Sessions, Donald Trump had telegraphed that his attorney general would leave following the 2018 midterm elections. Still, Justice Department aides were surprised when the call came quite literally the next morning. At about 10 a.m., on Nov. 7, a few of them gathered in Sessions's fifth-floor office as John Kelly, then Trump's chief of staff, delivered the news. Sessions asked Kelly if he could at least hold off until the end of the week. Kelly said he could not; it was either resign now, or await a presidential tweet. So Sessions's communications director pulled out her phone and tapped out a statement from the notes she prepared the day before, just in case. "Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. President," it concluded. Two aides grabbed it off the printer and carried it to the West Wing.

The previous three years had transpired for Jeff Sessions like a malarial dream. There he was in early 2016, beaming from the campaign stage in the Huntsville, Ala., suburb of Madison before a crowd of more than 10,000, Trump's prized opening act, extolling the inception of a "movement." There he was one year later in his dream job at the Justice Department, one gear shy of skipping as he zagged through the corridors of the West Wing, greeting old campaign and congressional acquaintances as they settled into their quarters, "like a kid in a candy store," one former White House official recalled. And there he was, just 22 days after his confirmation, issuing the terse statement recusing himself from any investigation his department might undertake into charges that Russia had interfered in the 2016 presidential election — the action that would send the dream spiraling into still weirder territory.

It had all happened with astonishing speed: the reports, in January 2017, that counterintelligence agents were investigating communications between Michael Flynn, Trump's national security adviser, and the Russian ambassador, Sergei Kislyak; Trump's conversation with the F.B.I. director, James Comey, six days after Sessions's confirmation in which Trump suggested Comey drop the investigation; the revelation that Sessions, too, had met with Kislyak during the campaign, despite his claims during his

confirmation hearings, under oath, that he had not. On March 2, Sessions appeared as briefly as possible before reporters to announce that he would be recusing himself from the looming Russia investigation. It was what virtually all Democrats, and some Republicans, in Congress believed he should have done. It also left Sessions a dead man walking in the halls of the White House that he had so recently skipped through, the unwitting protagonist of the era's most vivid cautionary tale about crossing Donald Trump.

It was in his hour of darkness, after his firing, that Sessions received a call from Trent Lott. The former Republican senator from Mississippi knew something about unceremonious downfalls, his tenure as Senate majority leader cut short in 2002 following a toast to the past presidential aspirations of one Strom Thurmond. ("If the rest of the country" had voted for Thurmond in 1948, when he ran on the pro-segregation Dixiecrat ticket, Lott said, "we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years, either.") But Lott had rebounded with ease, slinking back into Senate leadership before exiting politics on his own terms and settling into the life of a lobbyist. He had since acted as a kind of life coach for Senate friends — Kit Bond of Missouri, the late Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania — who were considering what might come after public service, and he suggested Sessions come by his office for a talk.

When he did, Lott gave Sessions a copy of a visual aid he put together several years earlier called "The Wheel of Fortune." The wheel, Lott told me, had a series of "spokes," all of which represent things you might do upon leaving politics. You could join a law firm! Give speeches! Write a book! Many lawmakers became professors or sat on corporate boards. Lott walked Sessions through the pros and cons of each. And so Sessions left K Street that day encouraged anew by the wide world before him.

The problem was that, as he commenced to spin the proverbial wheel as advised, the wide world only seemed to narrow. Much of 2019 unfurled for Sessions in a series of small indignities, a continual reminder that Trump's disfavor could cast its shadow over even a man who

won his fourth Senate term entirely unopposed. According to three people familiar with the matter, shortly after leaving the Justice Department, Sessions entered talks to join the law firm Maynard Cooper & Gale, which was founded in Birmingham, Ala. With a longtime friend of Sessions's pulling for him on the inside, the deal seemed all but done. But ultimately, the firm's leadership decided against bringing him in, the news of which was broken to Sessions over dinner at Charlie Palmer's in Washington. "People at Maynard obviously respect Jeff," said one person with direct knowledge of the decision, speaking on the condition of anonymity. "But I don't think, given the manner in which he left" the Justice Department, "he could make the business case for how the work would follow." (A spokeswoman for Maynard Cooper confirmed it had been in talks with Sessions, but declined further comment.)

Another heave of the wheel. Sessions considered starting a think tank, an institution that would endeavor to lend a scholarly heft to the right-wing populism that he had long espoused and that was now co-defined with Trump, but he was unable to find financing for the project. At one point, he agreed to meet with agents about writing a book about the Trump agenda, but decided against it.

One spoke still beckoned. "And I have to confess, you know," Lott recalled, "without being asked, I said, 'Let me just say right here at the beginning: I hope that you will not think about running again for the Senate. It's just not what it used to be.'"

On a recent June afternoon, after a long day of running for the Senate, Jeff Sessions retired to a corner booth at a Ruby Tuesday in the south Alabama town of Bay Minette. He wore a blue-and-white gingham button shirt and gray slacks. His eyes were a touch bloodshot and bleary. He ordered a glass of peach tea and, for the second time that day, dessert. "I don't know when I've had a pineapple upside-down cake," he mused to the waitress, studying the menu. "I don't have to eat all of it, do I?"

The day, his first on the nonvirtual campaign trail since March, began at Mac and Jerry's, a



Sessions sits before the Senate Judiciary Committee after being nominated for a U.S. District Court judgeship by President Reagan in 1986.

homespun breakfast spot in Robertsedale, where Sessions seemed pleasantly surprised by the modest crowd awaiting him. Ducking in from the rain, he placed his hands on his hips and looked around for one private moment, like a birthday celebrant who couldn't quite believe his guests had shown. "At least three people, maybe four, said: 'Our whole family voted for you,'" he told me at Ruby Tuesday. "I like to hear that."

Opportunities for affirmation had been few since Sessions, who is now 73, declared his candidacy for his old Senate seat last November. Despite early polls that showed him as the favorite, Sessions did not anticipate an easy primary. The field was wide, and he hoped in part to outspend his way to the top before moving on to what would likely be a race in name only against Doug Jones, the Democrat who won a special election for the seat in 2017. Instead, Sessions finished a narrow second in the primary and, per Alabama's election rules, advanced to a runoff against the former Auburn University football coach Tommy Tuberville. The spread of the coronavirus delayed the election until July 14. Polls have since showed Sessions trailing his opponent by as many as 20 points.

Sessions can probably thank Trump for this. The president remains more popular in Alabama than in virtually any other state, and on March 10, he endorsed Tuberville in a pair of tweets, calling

him a "REAL LEADER." He has been increasingly vocal in his contempt for his former attorney general, a contempt that seems to have only sharpened with time. "Jeff, you had your chance & you blew it," Trump tweeted in late May. "Recused yourself ON DAY ONE (you never told me of a problem), and ran for the hills. You had no courage & ruined many lives." There had been flashes of life for Sessions in recent weeks; a few surveys, and Sessions's internal polling, showed him closing the gap with Tuberville. Even so, he is still running behind a political novice in a Republican primary runoff for a seat he held for two decades, the loss of which would be tantamount to his final consignment to the political abyss.

Before voters, Sessions's voice can seem vaguely strained, flecked with irritation, even, when unwinding the events of the past four years. It is not so much that he is tired of rehashing his decision to recuse himself, the D.O.J. regulations and whatnot that required it, though undoubtedly that is part of it. Rather, he seems cosmically bewildered as to how he got to this point: fighting for his political life just as the Republican base appears more in thrall than ever to his brand of conservatism, fielding questions about his loyalty to a president who found acceptance in the G.O.P. establishment largely through Sessions.

If many elected Republicans ultimately came to support Trump out of convenience or

opportunism or fear, Sessions was — is — a true believer. The Republican Party, and even Trump's own administration, are littered with those who, when talking to reporters, squirm to telegraph their *great personal distaste* for the MAGA enterprise. Not Sessions. Today, when cornered in Capitol corridors by reporters, most G.O.P. lawmakers profess ignorance as to Trump's latest social-media activity. But unlike the bulk of his former colleagues, the gentleman from Alabama saw the tweet. He probably loved it too.

Even in his exile, perhaps no one is as eager as Sessions to hold forth on why he likes Trump, why his party — why the *country* — so desperately needs him. Nearly every tangent in our two-hour conversation eventually arrived at this view. At one point, we were discussing Syria's descent into anarchy over the past decade. "A banker I know from Greece," Sessions said, "he said you could go to Aleppo, you could do business deals, you could even buy whiskey. Cross Assad, you're in big trouble, but you could do business" before the Arab Spring. "He said, 'There's a difference between freedom and democracy. You need to understand this.'"

Sessions continued: "And you know who we want to run Syria? Assad. We are hoping that somehow he can get back in control. And there was no terrorism, no ISIS when he ran the place." (ISIS emerged in Syria under Bashar al-Assad's rule, which, while diminished, is ongoing.) "He'd kill 'em. And if you didn't cross him, he wouldn't kill you. And he protected Christians; they were a part of his coalition."

Sessions referred back to an earlier moment in the conversation, when I asked him how he considered his support of Trump from the standpoint of his faith as an evangelical Christian. "You asked how Christians could support Trump," he said. Consider Egypt's Christian minority under president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, he said: "It's not a democracy — he's a strongman, tough man, but he promised to protect them. And they believed him, because they didn't want the Muslim Brotherhood taking over Egypt. Because they knew they'd be vulnerable. They chose to support somebody that would protect them. And that's basically what the Christians in the United States did. They felt they were under attack, and the strong guy promised to defend them. And he has."

This reminded Sessions of the events of three days earlier, when U.S. Park Police tear-gassed protesters in Washington to make way for Trump as he strode to the front of St. John's Church, the basement of which was set on fire by rioters the night before. Stopping before the cameras, Trump held up a Bible. ("Is that your Bible?" one reporter asked. "It's a Bible," Trump responded.) "He came out there with that Bible," Sessions said, pausing briefly to giggle, "and so all the Episcopal bishops said: 'Ohhh! Horrible!' You know? But this was a defender of the faith." He continued in a faux tone of dismay: "Ohhh,

his heart's not right. He shouldn't have held that Bible up. ... 'Oh, that's malarkey.' Sessions rolled his eyes. "Just a bunch of socialist leftists."

Here, then, was the central paradox of Sessions's plight. In ethos and in substance, Sessions had long harbored the presentiments of Trumpism. On immigration, trade and policing, the dusted-off rhetoric of "law and order," his stamp on the president's administration remains indelible. And yet no figure has been more totally cast out of Trump's orbit.

It was Washington's early rejection of Sessions that kindled his political career to begin with. In 1986, Ronald Reagan nominated Sessions, then a United States Attorney, to a federal district judgeship in Alabama. During his confirmation hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, a black assistant U.S. attorney testified that Sessions had once called him "boy" (which Sessions denied) and said the Ku Klux Klan was "OK until I found out they smoked pot" (which Sessions said was a joke). Senators also questioned Sessions about his prosecution of three black civil rights activists, including Albert Turner Jr., a former aide to Martin Luther King Jr. who helped lead the march from Selma to Montgomery, for voter fraud in 1985. (After the judge threw out several counts, the jury acquitted all three on the rest.) Coretta Scott King and other civil rights leaders accused Sessions of having deliberately targeted the defendants, and she urged against his confirmation.

Sessions denied claims of unfair targeting and still stands by the case. But taken together, the accusations were enough to make him the first federal district court nominee in more than 30 years not to be confirmed. And denying Sessions the critical vote needed to advance his cause to the Senate floor was the Democratic senior senator from his own state, Howell Heflin.

As for the events that followed, Sessions would never confess to something so uncouth as revenge. But in 1996, when Heflin announced his retirement, and Sessions announced his intentions not just to succeed him, but, upon election, to vie for appointment to the very Judiciary Committee that had spurned him, Sessions could not suppress a stray grin when asked to reflect on the chance of it all. "I don't know that 'vindication' is the word," he told *The Montgomery Advertiser* as he settled into his new office, taking a seat for the first time in Heflin's old chair, at Heflin's old desk. "But there is a sense that life is a wonderful thing and things do work out in the end if you keep your head up and try to do right."

Sessions often told reporters at the start of his Senate career that he had no intention of being a "potted plant" while in office. He made the most of his coveted seat on the Judiciary Committee — where he would eventually serve as ranking member — occasionally asking judicial nominees: "Are you a member of the American Civil Liberties

Union, or have you ever been?" Nineteen years before the Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell blocked Merrick Garland's nomination to the Supreme Court, Sessions tried to upend Garland's confirmation to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia on the grounds that the seat itself was a "rip-off" to the taxpayer — exasperating even the committee's Republican chairman, Orrin Hatch of Utah, who snapped at Sessions for "playing politics with judges."

But it was immigration that preoccupied Sessions above all else. He fulminated about it in his floor speeches, often delivered on Friday afternoons when most of his colleagues had long since flown home for the weekend. In 2007, he led the opposition to George W. Bush's attempt at immigration reform, calling it "no illegal alien left behind." In 2013, as ranking member of the Senate Budget Committee, he called on Republicans to quash the so-called Gang of Eight's bipartisan immigration bill in favor of a "humble and honest populism." "The same set of G.O.P. strategists, lobbyists and donors who have always favored a proposal like the Gang of Eight immigration bill argue that the great lesson of the 2012 election is that the G.O.P. needs to push for immediate amnesty and a drastic surge in low-skill immigration," he wrote in a memo. "This is nonsense."

For these tirades, Sessions was largely written off by his colleagues as a backbencher with fringe views and little influence. He earned admirers in

the conservative media, however, such as Laura Ingraham and Michelle Malkin. *National Review* deemed him "Amnesty's Worst Enemy." On the matters of refugees, civil rights and prison reform, "you knew exactly who he was," said Al Franken, the former Democratic senator from Minnesota, who was friendly with Sessions during his tenure. "I mean, he took some really strange stances."

And then, finally, those stances met their moment — and their candidate. Perhaps more than anything else in his political life, Sessions treasures having been the first senator to endorse Trump, in February 2016. He traveled the country as the Trump campaign's national-security chairman, forming what felt like a preordained relationship with the man he was certain God planned to use for good. He helped craft the campaign's immigration platform and advised Trump on whom to select as his running mate. His devotion was so total that, when Trump won, Sessions was a "shoo-in" for whatever cabinet position he wanted, according to a former senior White House official who helped lead the transition. Attorney general was his one request.

"Well, I'll say this," Sessions told me: "I was surprised at how comfortable I felt about being attorney general."

Sessions told me he was moved by the chance to act on his and Trump's shared belief that the police were "demoralized" during the Obama years. "I

Sessions with then-candidate Donald Trump at Madison City Stadium, on Feb. 28, 2016, in Madison, Ala.



Photograph by Taylor Hill/WireImage, via Getty Images

'NATION-STATES ARE *NOT* GONE, THEY'RE NOT OUT OF DATE. AMERICA IS NOT AN *IDEA*, PAUL RYAN — IT'S A NATION.'

said, 'We're going to embrace this as our mission, we're going to *back* the police and we're going to *reduce* crime.' He began laying the groundwork for a zero-tolerance policy for illegal immigration, a crackdown on MS-13 gang members and a roll-back of the civil rights agenda advanced through the Justice Department during the Obama years. But these efforts were still in their infancy when, in March 2017, he made his fateful decision.

As Sessions still maintains, he believed that in recusing himself, he was doing what anyone in his position would have been obligated to do. "There's one term that he used to use a lot," recalled Rod Rosenstein, who served as deputy attorney general under Sessions: "'regular order.' And what he meant by that was, let's make sure we figure out what the rules are, and let's make sure we're following the rules, and let's make sure we're not getting distracted by inappropriate political considerations."

But it was in the aftermath of his recusal that White House officials, particularly those who had not worked on the campaign, were suddenly enlightened to Trump's capacity for rage. "It was really the first time I think any of us had ever seen him really blow up," the former official recalled. "He was frustrated with press coverage of crowd sizes — yes, he was angry about that — but he had never really raised his voice or shouted. But I remember him really laying into McGahn" — Don McGahn, then the White House counsel — "and *shouting*. It was very much like: 'How did you let this happen? How did this [expletive] happen?'"

At the time, Sessions had a small collection of friends and former colleagues in the White House, including Stephen K. Bannon, the chief executive of Trump's campaign and then his chief strategist in the administration, who has called Sessions his mentor and once pushed him to run for president. Bannon, as well as Reince Priebus, then the chief of staff, got in touch with Sessions and advised him to make himself scarce for a while, to lie low until Trump's attentions inevitably shifted elsewhere.

But for once, they didn't. For a time, Trump kept his frustrations off Twitter, his fixation on what he called "the ultimate betrayal" manifesting itself in venting sessions with aides instead.

Officials recalled how, after Robert Mueller's appointment as special counsel, meetings about any number of unrelated issues were derailed the moment Trump glanced at the television and saw a chyron related to the Russia investigation.

Even some aides who agreed with Sessions's decision found themselves sympathizing with the president's view that the existential terror of the Mueller investigation would never have emerged were it not for Sessions. ("I would have put him at the border if I'd known," Trump would often mutter, referring to the Department of Homeland Security. "I would have put him at the border.") More awkward for these aides was the digression into mockery of Sessions that sometimes followed. Trump would deride his accent — the slow drawl, the fact that he often paused for several seconds, sometimes midconversation, to think through his next words. Sessions also has a tendency to raise slightly up and down on the balls of his feet while standing and talking, a small tic onto which Trump gleefully latched.

Sessions's defenders in such moments were few. Bannon, who considered Sessions to be Trump's most effective ally from a policy standpoint, says he would try to press his case, to no avail. Some senators, including Lindsey Graham, stressed to Trump that Sessions had had no choice. Altogether silent, however, was Stephen Miller, a former Sessions aide turned Trump adviser who by now had emerged as an influential force in the White House, advancing the immigration-restriction agenda he and Sessions shared. Officials I spoke with had the impression that Miller at first retained affection for his former boss, even if he disagreed with Sessions's decision to recuse himself. Nevertheless, "he was never going to get caught defending the guy," a second former White House official said. "He never wanted Trump to view him as a 'Sessions guy,' and so whenever it came up, he just wouldn't talk. Sometimes it even seemed like he'd find a way to leave the room."

This appeared to stem in part from Jared Kushner's example. Trump's son-in-law despised Sessions, who came to be the chief opponent of Kushner's vision for criminal-justice reform, and at least once referred to him to colleagues as a racist. It was Miller's correct understanding early on that an alliance with Kushner was the ticket to

longevity in Trump's White House. But as Bannon pointed out to me: "Stephen Miller and the rest of the immigration gang would have gotten zero done were it not for what Sessions did at D.O.J."

Indeed, during the first two years of Trump's presidency, Sessions was arguably more successful than anyone else in Trump's cabinet in advancing the president's professed goals. If anything, Sessions told me, his only regret was not more forcefully advocating them. He recounted the outrage over his use of Scripture to defend border agents separating migrant children from their families, calling it "totally ridiculous." "I was right about that," he said. "I wish I'd fought it." Then, in a disturbing, guttural voice, he mocked much of the nation's reaction: "Nooooo, this is a poor child! They just want a job!" From law enforcement to immigration to the war on drugs, Sessions's conviction that the Obama administration had coddled criminals motivated much of his agenda. And unlike many of the president's appointees, Sessions "actually understood what the levers of power were to effect change," said Vanita Gupta, who led the Civil Rights Division during Obama's second term. "So he was actually pretty effective at killing big areas of some of the highest-profile work the Civil Rights Division had been doing."

Sessions reversed an Obama-era policy that specified protections for transgender workers against discrimination under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under Sessions, the department also filed briefs in support of states fighting court orders to curb potential voting rights infringements such as voter-ID laws. On his last day in office, Sessions formalized a policy that made it harder for the Justice Department to enter into consent decrees with local governments — policing reforms enforced by a federal judge, which were a cornerstone of Barack Obama's police-reform agenda and central to the role the federal government played in police-brutality cases in Ferguson, Mo., Baltimore and elsewhere.

The mantra was: "Back to the men and women in blue," Sessions told me. "The police had been demoralized. There was all the Obama — there's a riot, and he has a beer at the White House with some criminal, to listen to him. Wasn't having a beer with the police officers. So we said, 'We're on your side. We've got your back, you got our thanks.'" (Asked whether this was a confused reference to the meeting Obama had with the scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr., who had been wrongfully arrested entering his own home, and the police officer involved in the arrest, a Sessions spokesman declined to elaborate.)

Sessions seemed annoyed when I asked if he would support measures to reform law enforcement if he were re-elected. "I *suppose* we could do a survey about police —" he began. He paused for nine seconds and sighed, slumping slightly against the booth. "And see how they — whether their training is at the highest level or not." A few minutes later he returned to the subject: "I

think you should probably have some money for actually training for riots,” he said. “That’s what really needs to be done. Not tell the police, ‘If you were just more *sensitive*, riots wouldn’t occur.’”

He called Secretary of Defense Mark Esper “immature” for saying he did not support Trump’s threat, amid the nationwide protests following George Floyd’s death, to invoke the Insurrection Act, which allows a president to domestically deploy military troops to restore order. “Who cares what he thinks?” Sessions said. “The president can ask for his advice, or not ask for it. There’s one commander in chief of the United States military, Mr. Secretary. Not Esper.” It was every civil servant’s duty, he went on, to obey his or her commander with enthusiasm, or quit. “Who do you think runs this country?”

One theory holds that Sessions’s extreme fealty to the president was, in fact, what prolonged his problems with him. Sessions was willing to endure Trump’s personal derision in order to realize their shared vision for the country. Trump, on the other hand, seemed unnerved that anyone’s policy goals could outweigh their pride. And so with every sunny response to his insults, Trump’s disdain for Sessions deepened. “So many people in the White House thought the way to build a better relationship with Trump was just to agree with him on everything and praise him to the hilt and be sycophantic and plug those gaping insecurities that fuel his narcissism,” the first former White House official said. “When the reality is that once you actually give in to him like that, he detests you for it.” (The White House did not respond to multiple requests for comment.)

That dynamic has continued to plague Sessions in Alabama, where many Republican voters will brook no dissent of Trump but also question a man who appears disinclined to defend his own honor. On May 22, after Trump excoriated Sessions yet again on Twitter (“Alabama, do not trust Jeff Sessions. He let our Country down”), Sessions decided, for the first time, to push back. “Look, I know your anger, but recusal was required by law. I did my duty & you’re damn fortunate I did,” Sessions tweeted. “It protected the rule of law & resulted in your exoneration. Your personal feelings don’t dictate who Alabama picks as their senator, the people of Alabama do.” All told, one campaign aide told me, the composition of the tweet involved perhaps a dozen advisers and approximately 100 emails.

Sessions’s former colleagues, caught up in their own delicate dances with Trump, apparently see little upside to encouraging Sessions publicly, or even discussing their friendship with him. Of the many Republican senators I reached out to for this article, only Richard Shelby, Sessions’s old colleague in Alabama’s Senate delegation, agreed to talk. “I think Alabama would do well by sending him back, but you know, that’s ultimately up to the people,” Shelby told me. “We’ll see what happens in July. I have no idea.”

In the past four months, meanwhile, Trump and Tuberville have spoken frequently by phone, sometimes as often as twice a week. In mid-June, Tuberville joined the president on Air Force One when it landed in Dallas. When we spoke at Ruby Tuesday, Sessions acknowledged Tuberville’s appeal. College-football coaches, particularly in the Southeastern Conference, know how to pitch, how to sit in a living room with a skeptical recruit and his family and sell them on a future. And Tuberville’s pitch now, as Sessions, describing one recent campaign ad, characterizes it, is as follows: “I support Donald Trump. God sent Donald Trump, and I’m going up there and I’m going to do something. I’m strong; I yelled at the referee.” (Tuberville’s ad used a clip of him, in his Auburn days, berating an official on the field.) “Well, people like that. That’s a Trump — a Trump *thing*.”

But in Sessions’s eyes, Tuberville is poised to be yet another Republican who claims to support Trump in public while actively working against Trumpism. Congress is full of them now, Sessions says, lawmakers nursing an “ideological obsession” with free markets and free trade and open borders. “Like Tommy Tuberville says, ‘I’m 100 percent free market, I don’t believe in tariffs. ...’ There are a lot of Republican senators that believe that. Some of ‘em have probably *said* it. Most of them are too devious and gutless to say it.”

“Our moral duty is to citizens of the U.S.,” Sessions said, picking up the theme again later in the conversation. “Nation-states are *not* gone, they’re not out of date. America is not an *idea*, Paul Ryan — it’s a nation.” He began to bang his fists as he spoke, sending the silverware and ice in his peach tea aquiver. “It’s a *secular nation-state*. It has” — another bang — “*rules*.”

I had pointed out earlier that Trump’s hatred of Sessions stemmed from Sessions’s following the rules. “Well, he’s not a lawyer — he’s a doer,” Sessions replied. “I knew that when I signed on. But he’s been law-and-order for the most part, about supporting police.”

“You get to pick and choose in what areas?” I ventured.

“I didn’t expect him to be perfect. Nobody’s perfect. He’s new to Washington; he’s not a lawyer. He has less confidence in this legal system than I do, I’ll acknowledge that.”

“Did you think he had confidence in you?” I asked.

“Mm-hmm,” Sessions said. He paused to eat a forkful of pineapple cake. “He thinks what was done to him was wrong, and he thinks I could have stopped it. And he’s not interested in details.” He blotted his mouth with a napkin and laughed.

Sessions’s current existential tremors are not limited to regret for losing the president. Trump’s show of force in Washington in early June, and the police crackdowns on protesters in cities across the country, were a maximal expression of the law-and-order vision advanced by Sessions. But

as the nation reckons with that vision, it is difficult to deduce any great rallying around it; even Republicans voters, who broadly do not support the Black Lives Matter movement, are more likely to support it now than they were before the protests following George Floyd’s death, according to recent polling. Trump left Sessions, yes, but there seems about the candidate a dim unease that his country may have left him, too.

And so, having spent the past hour and a half recounting scenes from his life that perhaps did not make sense to him, he suddenly seemed anxious to anchor himself in the few that still did. Toward the end of the conversation, he commenced upon recollections of Camden, Ala., where he grew up. “It was an idyllic period,” he said. “Sort of a window. End of an age.”

I had driven to Camden the week before, a Black Belt town of some 2,000 people just off the Alabama River. When I arrived, I met Fleet Hollinger, a childhood friend of Sessions’s. In his black pickup, a heavy rain thrashing against the windshield, we steered through the sliver of downtown where the two movie theaters once stood, where, Hollinger recalled, you could catch a Gene Autry double feature for a dime. About 10 miles down the road was the Sessions family home, the slightly pitched roof and kerosene heater and mildew creeping up the front-porch screen. There was Bell’s Landing Presbyterian, est. 1819, behind which his parents are buried. For Sessions and his friends, summer Sundays began with the morning service there and ended in the swimming hole nearby. “Nobody didn’t really have anything, but we didn’t know it,” Hollinger said. “We were happy like we were.”

As Sessions tells it, life in Camden was ordered and disciplined and dependable. No wheels of fortune spinning in the wind. He careened from one reminiscence to the next — going barefoot to school, the beautiful Beth Jones, Miss Watson’s trigonometry class. At one point, his communications director had nudged him to wrap up. But 20 minutes later, Sessions was still there, seemingly in a daze, plucking at footnotes from a past life. “It was segregated,” he acknowledged, “so we had those, we had advantages from ...” He trailed off. “I don’t know, I don’t know,” he said, his voice barely above a mumble, trying to articulate what had made that time so singular. “I’m at a loss, actually. I haven’t quite got — figured that out yet.”

He seemed quietly desperate to reaffirm the conviction borne out of his upbringing, that in politics as in Eagle Scouts, there is still regular order, and all things work together for the good of those who follow it. “Like, well, a federal retirement will pay me just about as much as being a senator,” he said. “I’ve got 10 grandchildren and they’re all doing well. I’ve got a home in Alabama, a place in the country to hide out in if I need to. How much better can it get than this?”

“So I don’t care what they say,” he went on. Then, with a faint laugh: “Sometimes I don’t.” ♦

ever met.” And what did that mean? She tried again: “He’s so beautifully and strongly vulnerable as a human, but he’s also not. Oh, God,” she said, “now I feel like a [expletive] because I just hate myself for even trying to describe the man.” The actress Catherine Keener, a close friend of Kaufman’s who has appeared in three of his films and been attached to a few of his stalled projects over the years, actually took the proactive step of signaling to me in advance, via text, how lousy she would be at talking about Kaufman and started crumpling under that difficulty within a few seconds of my getting her on the phone: “If you could see my face, you would know how I feel when I talk about Charlie,” she insisted, though it was, in fact, completely apparent to me — not only from the warmth of Keener’s tone but in the vigorous determination with which she kept trying to describe Kaufman, how sincerely she wanted me to know what she knew. “Charlie is, you know, out of this world and kind of normal at the same time,” she said. “I feel like he can have a conversation with anybody and also ... he can *not*.” Finally, having again failed to put some other elemental quality of Kaufman’s into words, Keener just told me, with defeat and delight, “Charlie knows what he is!”

I don’t mean to be flip about this; I empathized with the problem because I was experiencing it myself. I worried that the conversations Kaufman and I were having wouldn’t translate well in print either; that people would skim through the article I was writing impatiently, feeling exhausted by Kaufman and his tendency to process every minuscule facet of existence through a vast, clattering, Rube Goldberg machine of introspection. But in real life, it was actually pretty moving to listen to. His vulnerability didn’t make you want to turn away from him; it made you want to be vulnerable too.

Jonze remembered Kaufman’s telling him about the novel he was working on a few years ago at a diner. Jonze could still picture the diner perfectly and where in the diner he and Kaufman were seated, and he remembered how excited he was by everything Kaufman was communicating about the story. But the specifics had gone weirdly fuzzy for Jonze since then. “It almost feels like trying to remember a dream,” he told me. “The ideas, they were so — I don’t know what the right word is: They occupy the same part of my brain that dreams do.”

“Was there something about a film archive?” Jonze asked me. “Is that still in there?”

I started telling Jonze about the book. A 58-year-old, excruciatingly self-important academic film critic named B. Rosenberger Rosenberg, who teaches “a cinema studies elective at the Howie Sherman Zoo Worker Institute in Upper Manhattan,” travels to Florida to research

his next monograph, on an obscure silent film. But Rosenberg abandons that project when he has a chance encounter — or is it chance? — with a centenarian shut-in named Ingo Cutbirth, who has spent his life shooting a stop-motion animation movie in his apartment. Rosenberg seizes on it as a potential work of outsider art. And because Kaufman has written his narrator as a satire of white-savior arrogance, Rosenberg considers it a tantalizing bonus that the reclusive artist behind this presumed masterpiece is African-American. Rosenberg smells glory and prestige — for himself, the discoverer of the film.

He watches the movie. It has to do with the creation of the universe, time travel and a future civil war, plus an old-timey comedy duo known as Mudd and Molloy and their escalating, murderous feuds with other, competing comedy duos. There’s a donkey and a giant and a hyper-intelligent ant named Calcium. The film is three months long. That’s how long it takes to view it, straight through. (It is structured with set bathroom and sleep breaks.) And at some point, while Rosenberg is watching it, Cutbirth drops dead.

Consumed with despicable ambition masquerading as a calling, Rosenberg packs everything into a U-Haul and heads back to New York, intent on carrying Cutbirth’s genius into the culture, posthumously. But the truck catches fire, everything is destroyed and when Rosenberg resurfaces from a coma, he has forgotten the entire film, of which only a single, meaningless frame survived.

That covers about the first 80 pages, I explained to Jonze. “Antkind” is 700 pages long.

“Oh, my God, it’s 700 pages?” Jonze blurted out. He was elated.

Something about the book knocked me off balance: the relentlessness of its language, the increasing claustrophobia of Rosenberg’s interior monologue and the mushrooming absurdity of his suffering as, struggling to reconstruct Cutbirth’s film over the course of the novel, he loses his job and apartment and his life grinds into a kind of nonsensical dust. The humiliation and indignities fly at him from all directions. He’s plagued by improbable accidents. He falls into an open manhole. Then he falls into another open manhole. Then another. Each time, he happens to be bad-mouthing the filmmaker Charlie Kaufman, deriding him as “a pathetic narcissist on the scale of Adolf Hitler or, quite frankly, beyond, who the world is fortunate does not have any real power,” or recounting a lecture he delivered to the San Antonio chapter of the League of Women Voters, titled “I Vote With My Feet When It Comes to Kaufman.”

As a critic, Rosenberg has an antagonistic relationship with comedy. He disapproves of it, considers it violent and abusive: A coyote must always be bonked by an anvil so a roadrunner can laugh. But now, he’s being debased the same way, the three-dimensionality of his pain flattened into a punchline.

“I have come to the conclusion that I am ridiculous,” he eventually announces. “The mishaps. The open manholes. Even the fire that ruined Ingo’s film and my life. But perhaps more horrific are my thoughts. My thinking is silly. My memories are preposterous. My ideas are laughable. I am a pompous clown. I can, on occasion, become aware of this. There are moments of clarity that I find all the more humiliating because I can see myself as others likely do, but I cannot control any of it.”

“A lot of fiction or screenplays are written from a distance,” Kaufman told me one Wednesday many Wednesdays ago. “There’s a perspective of knowing” — a retrospective awareness of what happened. Consider a toothache, he said. A truly searing, excruciating toothache can overcome you entirely: your mouth, your body, your mind. “It can be a very primal moment in your life,” he said. “But compare that to a year later, telling the story of having a toothache to a friend at dinner. You no longer have a toothache, presumably. You’ve got a *story* about having a toothache, with a beginning, middle and end. You can tell it as an anecdote. But when you’re in the middle of the toothache, you don’t have that perspective. It’s a very chaotic moment.”

Kaufman’s point was that he strove as much as possible to write with an imperfect sense of where a story is going, to keep its meaning a secret from himself. “I don’t have any lessons to impart,” he said, “and I want to make sure I can’t.” This accounts for the many dreamlike elements of his work, like the suburban house in “Synecdoche, New York” that is perpetually on fire, even as a character lives in it for decades. These images sweep in from the fringes of his intellect, just like dreams. But, for Kaufman, this approach is fundamentally a matter of realism. “It allows me to tell the story not as a story that is untrue or dishonest,” he said.

“It goes back to that feeling of not understanding the world,” he went on, “not understanding what we’re doing here and why the things that happen to us happen to us — not having a clue! We’re all very vulnerable, and everything is uncertain moment to moment. That’s always the case, in every moment of our life. But our face is being rubbed in it right now.” The virus, he meant; it was still, at that point, the thing that people seemed to be referring to when they said “right now.”

“I’ve always worried about all possible outcomes for anything I ever embarked on,” he said. Even growing up, on Long Island and in Connecticut, Kaufman doesn’t remember feeling invincible, the way kids often do. Writing and directing appeared to be “a way for me to take chances without the same fear,” he went on. “I feel like I’m a lot more open to making mistakes and failing, of doing the wrong thing, in work. I often think about that and wish I could be more like that in my real life.”

Kaufman thought a lot about embarrassment: He came to the conclusion recently that it’s at the

root of most of his characters' struggles — the hazard that impedes them, the sting in their wounds — and central to his own experience, too. As a child, Kaufman loved acting in plays and musicals, but when he went to study acting at Boston University, he suddenly found it very embarrassing and, swamped by that embarrassment, transferred to film school at New York University, intending to become a screenwriter and director, which also felt embarrassing, but bearably so.

He remembered, once in high school, cracking a joke while driving with a friend, sending the kid into a fit of laughter. But then the friend stopped laughing, abruptly, signaling that he hadn't found the joke funny at all. He was messing with Kaufman. This wasn't some horrendous trauma, Kaufman said; growing up, he was teased a lot and bullied physically and made to feel small and powerless in any number of ways. Still, when he mentioned embarrassment, this was the memory that bubbled up: "I had made myself vulnerable," he said. "I trusted it. And I felt so humiliated and mortified and just — *embarrassed*: not only that he was faking the laugh and that I had believed it, but that I'd let myself laugh, too. That distrust," he went on, "became a kind of fabric in my psyche."

We'd been on the phone for an hour and a half by then, far past the point of me asking Kaufman actual questions. The conversation had roamed somewhere formless but important, and I registered for the first time how accustomed we had grown, here in our fourth week, to sitting on the phone together like this, collaborating on this strange, joint project of revealing and deciphering who Charlie Kaufman is, like two men showing up every morning to paint a house.

After another four weeks, our conversations essentially collapsed in on themselves: I confessed to Kaufman how freaked out I was about having to sit down and actually write this piece, and we started spitballing ideas for how I might construct it.

The problem, I explained, was that "I have to do exactly what you said you don't like to do!" Instead of writing from within the confusion of the present, it was my job to look back on this time we'd spent together on the phone and compress it into the form of a magazine article, driving the details toward some simplified understanding of who he was. It felt dishonest. Also, inadequate: like a waste of such an unusual experience.

"Well, maybe don't do that," he said. "Maybe don't feel constrained by that. Maybe surprise yourself."

So, surmounting some discomfort, I tried, and turned the rest of that conversation into the opening of my first draft:

"I would never, and I am not, presuming to tell you how to write this," Kaufman began. "But just as a thought experiment: If I were writing this article about me

from your perspective — and I was still me — I would start to think about that tension I'm feeling in writing the article. And I would include that in the article. Not even 'include' it. I might even hinge the entire thing on that tension. Because that's the truth."

This was one simplified understanding of who Charlie Kaufman was: He was someone who valued truth. When he detected the absence of it, it pained him. He would prefer, for example, if film critics prefaced their negative reviews by disclosing that they'd just had a fight with their spouse, or: 'I don't like this guy because I don't like the way he looks.' Because those things are true, he said. Our thoughts and feelings are true. They are facets of the world at whichever moment we attempt to describe it.

"You'd be called self-indulgent, which I am all the time," Kaufman said. "But if it's done in a way that's expansive, to me it's very interesting. Because that is what's going on. Because it's true."

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I didn't want to be called self-indulgent. But we agreed that whatever I turned in would have to face head-on the weirdness of the circumstances that produced it. It would be too hard, and probably ultimately more embarrassing, to try and contort myself around that reality and write a conventional profile, acting as though the entire process had been unremarkable.

Right, Kaufman said. "Because what would we have done if there was no quarantine or no social distancing. How much would we have talked? Just one day?"

"Maybe two?" I said. It was still being negotiated when the pandemic swept in. I'd been in frequent contact with his publisher for months, operating under the assumption that Kaufman, being a famous filmmaker, was a Beyoncé-like figure whose time must be haggled for through official channels. When I'd asked a publicist, however, what Kaufman would be doing this spring, in the hopes of tagging along, I was forwarded this reply from Kaufman: "On March 11, I am going to the D.M.V. to get my New York driver's license. He can come with me for that."

And so, that was the plan for the story: Charlie Kaufman Goes to the D.M.V. — an odd premise for a celebrity profile, but the celebrity being profiled was odd, so it struck everyone as reasonable, even like a stroke of luck. ("I think the reason the D.M.V. sounds like a good idea is because it sounds like a scene from one of his films," my editor told me.) But then circumstances changed, and I had to improvise and account for the new restrictions and constraints. Then those circumstances changed, and I had to improvise again.

At every step, my thinking felt silly. My ideas felt laughable. I worried I would come off like a pompous clown. But the thing needed to be honest. What else could a person do?

Another Wednesday. Kaufman was talking again about his desire to write from within the tumult and unpredictability of the present tense, striving to give his writing something similar to the feeling of spontaneity that makes a good actor's performance seem real.

Think about it, he said: "Everything we do in life is an improvisation. We're improvising right now" — me and him. Neither of us knew what the other person was about to say nor could we understand the secret slop of motives, judgments or insecurities from which it would emerge. "We often have scripts that we abide by," Kaufman said. "But at any moment, we can break out of that script and find something new. We can all do that in real life."

To be clear, Kaufman hardly ever does this. He often walks around with a presumption that individual strangers hate him, or attuned to currents of potential conflict or humiliation humming between him and every other human being. And now, the virus had literalized that psychic vulnerability, made it lethal. In New York, he said, everybody's mind-set seemed to be: "You're the enemy. You're the virus" — which, in essence, you are. You could really be the thing that's going to make me sick and possibly die."

Still, he explained, on one of their long walks around the West Side of Manhattan recently, he and his daughter encountered a man standing outside his home on a desolate-feeling street. "We were getting very close to him," Kaufman said — "not within the prescribed distance or anything, but we're pretty close." The man wasn't wearing a mask. As they approached, the man smiled.

"It was really moving to me," Kaufman said. "I actually got a little emotional. It was a very genuine smile." Telling me this, Kaufman went silent. The feeling had caught hold of him again.

"It just felt kind," he went on. "And you know when someone's kind to you — it can be very small; it doesn't have to be anything in particular, just a moment you have with somebody, and they're kind. You know how that can change you? It can soften you. It can open you up to something — for hours. If you can keep that feeling and use it, it can spread."

"I don't know," Kaufman said. "But that's improvisation. That man's smile was not canned. I know that. I could feel it. It was just a genuine smile."

As they walked by, Kaufman smiled back. He forced himself to — a pretty big smile, at that. But Kaufman was wearing a mask and worried the man wouldn't be able to tell. So then he had to screw up his courage. He raised his arm a little. He waved.

"I hoped he understood on some level that I was appreciative of it." ♦

by definition be casteist, as their hatred demands that those they perceive as beneath them know and keep their place in the hierarchy.

In everyday terms, it is not racism that prompts a white shopper in a clothing store to go up to a random black or brown person who is also shopping and to ask for a sweater in a different size, or for a white guest at a party to ask a black or brown person who is also a guest to fetch a drink, as happened to Barack Obama as a state senator, or even perhaps a judge to sentence a subordinate-caste person for an offense for which a dominant-caste person might not even be charged. It is caste or rather the policing of and adherence to the caste system. It's the autonomic, unconscious, reflexive response to expectations from a thousand imaging inputs and neurological societal downloads that affix people to certain roles based upon what they look like and what they historically have been assigned to or the characteristics and stereotypes by which they have been categorized. No ethnic or racial category is immune to the messaging we all receive about the hierarchy, and thus no one escapes its consequences.

When we assume that a woman is not equipped to lead the meeting or the company or the country, or that a person of color or an immigrant could not be the one in authority, is not a resident of a certain community, could not have attended a particular school or deserved to have attended a particular school, when we feel a pang of shock and resentment, a personal wounding and sense of unfairness and perhaps even shame at our discomfort upon seeing someone from a marginalized group in a job or car or house or college or appointment more prestigious than we have been led to expect, we are reflecting the efficient encoding of caste, the subconscious recognition that the person has stepped out of his or her assumed place in our society. We are responding to our embedded instructions of who should be where and who should be doing what, the breaching of the structure and boundaries that are the hallmarks of caste.

Race and caste are not the cause of and do not account for every poor outcome or unpleasant encounter. But caste becomes a factor, to whatever infinitesimal degree, in interactions and decisions across gender, ethnicity, race, immigrant status, sexual orientation, age or religion that have consequences in our everyday lives and in policies that affect our country and beyond. It may not be as all-consuming as its targets may perceive it to be, but neither is it the ancient relic, the long-ago anachronism, that post-racialists, post-haters of everything, keep wishing away. Its invisibility is what gives it power and longevity. Caste, along with its faithful servant race, is an X-factor in most any American equation, and any answer one might ever come up with to address our current challenges is flawed without it.

THROUGH THE FOG OF DELHI TO THE PARALLELS IN INDIA AND AMERICA

My flight to India landed in a gray veil that hid the terminal and its tower at the international airport in Delhi. It was January 2018, my first moments on the subcontinent. The pilot searched for a jetway through the drapery of mist. It was 2 in the morning, and it was as if we had landed in a steam kettle, were still airborne in a cloud, the night air pressing against cabin windows, and we could see nothing of the ground. I had not heard of rain in the forecast and was fascinated by this supernatural fog in the middle of the night, until I realized that it was not fog at all but smoke — from coal plants, cars and burning stubble — trapped in stagnant wind. The pollution was a shroud at first to seeing India as it truly was.

At daybreak, the sun pushed through the haze, and once I connected with my hosts, I raced along with them to cross an intersection, an open stretch of asphalt with cars hurtling in every direction with no lanes or speed limits. We made our way along the side streets to the conference we were attending. I saw the wayside altars and mushroom temples with their garlands and silk flowers to the Hindu deities at the base of the sacred fig trees. There, commuters can pause for reflection as they head to work or an exam or a doctor's visit. The sidewalk shrines seemed exotic to me until I thought of the American ritual of spontaneous altars of flowers and balloons at the site of something very different, at the site of an accident or tragedy, as for Heather Heyer, the counterprotester killed at the infamous neo-Confederate rally in Charlottesville, Va., just months before. Both reflect a human desire to connect with and honor something or someone beyond ourselves.

The United States and India are profoundly different from each other — in culture, technology, economics, history, ethnic composition. And yet, many generations ago, these two great lands paralleled each other, each protected by oceans, fertile and coveted and ruled for a time by the British. Each adopted social hierarchies and abides great chasms between the highest and the lowest in their respective lands. Each was conquered by people said to be Aryans arriving, in one case, from across the Atlantic Ocean, in the other, from the north. Those deemed lowest in each country would serve those deemed high. The younger country, the United States, would become the most powerful democracy on Earth. The older country, India, would become the largest.

Their hierarchies are profoundly different. And yet, as if operating from the same instruction manual translated to fit their distinctive cultures, both countries adopted similar methods of maintaining rigid lines of demarcation and protocols.

Both countries kept their dominant caste separate, apart and above those deemed lower. Both exiled their indigenous peoples — the Adivasi in India, the Native Americans in the United States — to remote lands and to the unseen margins of society. Both countries enacted an amalgam of laws to chain the lowliest group — Dalits in India (formerly known as the untouchables) and African-Americans in the United States — to the bottom, using terror and force to keep them there.

"Perhaps only the Jews have as long a history of suffering from discrimination as the Dalits," the American civil rights advocate Yussuf Naim Kly wrote in 1987. "However, when we consider the nature of the suffering endured by the Dalits, it is the African-American parallel of enslavement, apartheid and forced assimilation that comes to mind."

The United States and India have since abolished the formal laws that defined their caste systems — the United States in a series of civil rights laws in the 1960s and India more than a decade before, starting in 1949 — but both caste systems live on in hearts and habits, institutions and infrastructures. Both countries still live with the residue of codes that prevailed for far longer than they have not.

In both countries and often at the same time, the lowest castes toiled for their masters — African-Americans in the tobacco fields along the Chesapeake or in the cotton fields of Mississippi, Dalits plucking tea in Kerala and cotton in Nandurbar. Both worked as enslaved people and later for the right to live on the land that they were farming, African-Americans in the system of sharecropping, Dalits in the Indian equivalent, known as *saldari*, both still confined to their fixed roles at the bottom of their respective societies.

While doors have opened to the subordinated castes in India and in America in the decades since discrimination was officially prohibited, the same spasms of resistance have afflicted both countries. What is called "affirmative action" in the United States is called "reservations" in India, and they are equally unpopular with the upper castes in both countries, language tracking in lock step, with complaints of reverse discrimination in one and reverse casteism in the other.

There are many overarching similarities to the countries' caste systems, but they are not the same in how they are structured or operate. The American system was founded as a primarily two-tiered hierarchy with its contours defined by the uppermost group, those identified as white, and by the subordinated group, those identified as black, with immigrants from outside Europe forming blurred middle castes that sought to adjust themselves within a bipolar structure, and Native Americans largely exiled outside it.

The Indian caste system, by contrast, is an elaborate fretwork of thousands of subcastes, or *jatis*, correlated to region and village, which fall under the four main *varnas* — the Brahmin,

the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Shudra and the excluded fifth, the Dalits. It is further complicated by non-Hindus — including Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians — who are outside the original caste system but have incorporated themselves into the workings of the country, at times in the face of resistance and attack, and may or may not have informal rankings among themselves and in relation to the *varnas*.

The Indian caste system historically has been said to be stable and unquestioned by those within it, bound as it is by religion and the Hindu belief in reincarnation, the belief that a person carries out in this life the karma of the previous ones, suffers the punishment or reaps the rewards for deeds in a past life, and that the more keenly you follow the rules for the caste you were born into, the higher your station will be in the next life.

Some observers say that this is what distinguishes the Indian caste system from any other, that people in the lowest caste accept their lot, that it is fixed and unbending, that Dalits presumably live out their karma decreed by the gods and do their lowly work without complaint, knowing not to dream of anything more. In order to survive, some people in a subordinated caste may learn and believe that resistance is futile. But this condescending view disregards generations of resistance, and the work of the beloved Dalit leader Bhimrao Ambedkar and the reformer Jyotiba Phule before him. It was also wrongly assumed of enslaved Africans, and it disregards a fundamental truth of the species, that all human beings want to be free.

The Dalits were no more contented with their lot than anyone would be. In a caste system, conflating compliance with approval is dehumanizing in itself. Many Dalits looked out beyond their homeland, surveyed the oppressed people all over the world and identified the people closest to their lamentations. They recognized a shared fate with African-Americans, few of whom would have known of the suffering of Dalits. Some Dalits felt so strong a kinship with one wing of the American civil rights movement and followed it so closely that in the 1970s they created the Dalit Panthers, inspired by the Black Panther Party.

Several years ago, a group of largely African-American professors made a trip to a rural village in the Indian state Uttar Pradesh. There, hundreds of villagers from the lowliest subcaste, the scavengers, came together for a ceremony to welcome the Americans.

The villagers sang Dalit liberation songs for the occasion. Then they turned to their American guests and invited them to sing a liberation song of their own. A law professor from Indiana University, Kenneth Dau-Schmidt, began a song that the civil rights marchers sang in Birmingham and Selma before they faced sheriffs' dogs and fire hoses. As he reached the refrain, the Dalit hosts joined in and began to sing with their American counterparts. Across the oceans, they well knew the words to "We Shall Overcome."

THE MUDSILL AND THE JATIS

When a house is being built, the single most important piece of the framework is the first wood beam secured to the foundation. That piece is called the mudsill, the sill plate that runs along the base of a house and anchors the entire structure above it. The studs and subfloors, the ceilings and windows, the doors and roofing, all the components that make it a house are built on top of the mudsill. In a caste system, the mudsill is the bottom caste that everything else rests upon.

In the Indian caste system, an infinitely more elaborate hierarchy, the subcaste, or *jati*, to which a person was born established the occupation their family fulfilled, from cleaners of latrines to priests in the temples. Those born to families who collected refuse or tanned the hides of animals or handled the dead were seen as the most polluted and lowest in the hierarchy, untouchable because of the dreaded and thankless though necessary task they were presumably born to fulfill.

Similarly, African-Americans, throughout most of their time in this land, were relegated to the dirtiest, most demeaning and least desirable jobs by definition. After enslavement and well into the 20th century, they were primarily restricted to the role of sharecroppers and servants — domestics, lawn boys, chauffeurs and janitors. The most that those who managed to get an education could hope for was to teach, minister to, attend to the health needs of or bury other subordinate-caste people.

The state of South Carolina, right after the Civil War, effectively prohibited black people from performing any labor other than farm or domestic work, defining their place in the caste system. In North Carolina, during slavery, people in the lowest caste were forbidden to sell or trade goods of any kind or be subject to 39 lashes, a custom that echoed into the era of sharecropping. This blocked the main route to earning money from their own farm labors and forced them into economic dependence on the dominant caste, as intended.

"Anything that causes the Negro to aspire to rise above the plow handle, the cook pot — in a word the functions of a servant," said Gov. James K. Vardaman of Mississippi, elected in 1903, "will be the worst thing on earth for the Negro. God Almighty designed him for a menial; he is fit for nothing else."

Those who managed to go North after the Civil War and in the bigger waves of the Great Migration, starting during World War I, found that they could escape the South but not their caste.

They entered the North at the bottom, beneath Southern and Eastern Europeans who might not yet have learned English but who were permitted

into unions and into better-served neighborhoods that barred black citizens whose labor had cleared the wilderness and built the country's wealth. While there was no federal law restricting people to certain occupations on the basis of race, statutes in the South and custom in the North kept lower-caste people in their place. Northern industries often hired African-Americans only as strikebreakers, and unions blocked them from entire trades reserved for whites, such as pipe fitters or plumbers. City inspectors would refuse to sign off on the work of black electricians. A factory in Milwaukee turned away black men seeking jobs as they walked toward the front gate. Even before many black Southerners arrived in the North, black people in New York and Philadelphia were denied licenses merely to drive carts.

Thus, the caste lines in America may have at one time appeared even starker than those in India. In 1890, "85 percent of black men and 96 percent of black women were employed in just two occupational categories," wrote the sociologist Stephen Steinberg, "agriculture and domestic or personal service." Forty years later, as the Depression set in and as African-Americans moved to Northern cities, the percentages of black people at the bottom of the labor hierarchy remained the same, though by then, nearly half of black men were doing manual labor that called merely for a strong back. Only 5 percent were listed as white-collar workers — many of them ministers, teachers and small-business owners who catered to other black people.

The historic association between menial labor and blackness served to further entrap black people in a circle of subservience in the American mind. They were punished for being in the condition that they were forced to endure. And the image of servitude shadowed them into freedom.

As the caste system evolved in the 20th century, the dominant caste found ever more elaborate ways to enforce occupational hierarchy. "If white and colored persons are employed together," the sociologist Bertram Doyle wrote in the 1930s, "they do not engage in the same tasks, generally, and certainly not as equals." He continued: "Negroes are seldom, if ever, put into authority over white persons. Moreover, the Negro expects to remain in the lower ranks; rising, if at all, only over other Negroes." No matter how well he does his job, Doyle wrote, "he cannot often hope for promotion."

Since the early 20th century, the wealthiest African-Americans — from Louis Armstrong to Muhammad Ali — have traditionally been entertainers and athletes. Even now, in a recent ranking of the richest African-Americans, 17 of the top 20 — from Oprah Winfrey to Jay-Z to Michael Jordan — made their wealth as innovators, and then moguls, in the entertainment industry or in sports.

Historically, this group would come to predominate the realm carved out for them, often

celebrated unless they went head to head against a person in the dominant caste, as did the black boxer Jack Johnson when he was pitted against the white boxer James J. Jeffries in 1910. Many white people resented Johnson after he became the first black heavyweight champion in 1908. They mounted a campaign to coax Jeffries, the undefeated former champion, out of retirement to reclaim the title they believed was theirs. In an era of virulent race hatred, the press stoked passions by calling Jeffries “the Great White Hope.”

The two faced off on the Fourth of July at a packed stadium built just for the occasion in Reno, Nev. It was billed as the “Fight of the Century,” with bookies heavily favoring Jeffries to win. Johnson knocked Jeffries down in the 15th round and was declared the victor, to jeers and epithets. It was taken as an affront to white sovereignty and triggered white riots across the country, in the North and the South, including 11 separate ones in New York City, where white mobs set fire to black tenements and tried to lynch two black men over the defeat. The message was that, even in an arena into which the lowest caste had been permitted, they were to know and remain in their place.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

Some years ago, I was a national correspondent at The New York Times, based in Chicago, and decided to do a lighthearted piece about Chicago’s Magnificent Mile, a prime stretch of Michigan Avenue that had always been the city’s showcase, but now several big luxury names from New York and elsewhere were about to take up residence. I figured retailers would be delighted to talk. As I planned the article, I reached out to them for interviews. Everyone I called was thrilled to describe their foray into Chicago and to sit down with The Times.

The interviews went as expected until the last one. I had arrived a few minutes early to make sure we could start on time, given the deadline I was facing.

The boutique was empty at this quiet hour of the late afternoon. The manager’s assistant told me the manager would be arriving soon from another appointment. She went to a back corner as I stood alone in the showroom. A man in a business suit and tie finally walked in, harried and breathless. From the back corner, she nodded that this was he, so I went up to introduce myself and get started. He was out of breath, had been rushing, coat still on, checking his watch.

“Oh, I can’t talk with you now,” he said, brushing past me. “I’m very, very busy. I’m running late for an appointment.”

I was confused at first. Might he have made another appointment for the exact same time? Why would he schedule two appointments at once? There was no one else in the boutique but the two of us and his assistant in back.

“I think I’m your appointment,” I said.

“No, this is a very important appointment with The New York Times,” he said, pulling off his coat. “I can’t talk with you now. I’ll have to talk with you some other time.”

“But I am with The New York Times,” I told him, pen and notebook in hand. “I talked with you on the phone. I’m the one who made the appointment with you for 4:30.”

“What’s the name?”

“Isabel Wilkerson with The New York Times.”

“How do I know that?” he shot back, growing impatient. “Look, I said I don’t have time to talk with you right now. She’ll be here any minute.”

He looked to the front entrance and again at his watch.

“But I am Isabel. We should be having the interview right now.”

He let out a sigh. “What kind of identification do you have? Do you have a business card?”

This was the last interview for the piece, and I had handed them all out by the time I got to him.

“I’ve been interviewing all day,” I told him. “I happen to be out of them now.”

“What about ID? You have a license on you?”

“I shouldn’t have to show you my license, but here it is.”

He gave it a cursory look.

“You don’t have anything that has The New York Times on it?”

“Why would I be here if I weren’t here to interview you? All of this time has passed. We’ve been standing here, and no one else has shown up.”

“She must be running late. I’m going to have to ask you to leave so I can get ready for my appointment.”

I left and walked back to the Times bureau, dazed and incensed, trying to figure out what had just happened. This was the first time I had ever been accused of impersonating myself. His caste notions of who should be doing what in society had so blinded him that he dismissed the idea that the reporter he was anxiously awaiting, excited to talk to, was standing right in front of him. It seemed not to occur to him that a New York Times national correspondent could come in a container such as mine, despite every indication that I was she.

The article ran that Sunday. Because I had not been able to interview him, he didn’t get a mention. It would have amounted to a nice bit of publicity for him, but the other interviews made it unnecessary in the end. I sent him a clip of the piece along with the business card that he had asked for. To this day, I won’t step inside that shop. I will not mention the name, not because of censorship or a desire to protect any company’s reputation but because of our cultural tendency

to believe that if we just identify the presumed-to-be-rare offending outlier, we will have rooted out the problem. The problem could have happened anywhere, because the problem is, in fact, at the root.

THE RACE TO GET UNDER THE WHITE TENT

At the turn of the 20th century, as the country began refining the rules of admittance to the dominant caste and further tightened the restrictions on those at the bottom, Ybor City, Fla., as elsewhere in the South, began to segregate its streetcars. Cubans there, uncertain as to how they would be classified, were relieved “to discover that they were allowed to sit in the white section,” according to the historical researcher Jan Voogd.

By extending the dream of dominion over the land and all others in it to anyone who could meet the definition of white, the American caste system became an all-or-nothing gambit for the top rung.

Those permitted under the white tent could reap the rewards of full citizenship, rise to positions of high status (or as far as their talents could take them), get access to the best the country had to offer or, at the very least, be accorded respect in everyday interactions from subordinate groups who risked assault for any misstep. A two-tiered caste system raised the stakes for whiteness, leading to court dockets filled with people on the borderline seeking admission to the upper caste.

A Japanese immigrant named Takao Ozawa had lived in the United States for more than 20 years. He tried to make the case that he was worthy of citizenship and should qualify as white because his skin was lighter than that of many “white people.” What did it mean to be white if someone with actual white skin was not white? His case went all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1922, the court held unanimously that white meant not skin color but “Caucasian,” and that Japanese were not Caucasian, notwithstanding the fact that few white Americans had origins in the Caucasus Mountains of Eurasia either and that those who did were at that very moment being kept out, too.

The Ozawa decision and others of that era were a heartbreaking catastrophe for Asians seeking citizenship. With pro-Western European sentiment running high, the government began rescinding the naturalized citizenship of people of Asian descent who were already here. This amounted to an abandonment of people who had lived legally in the United States for most of their adult lives, as would echo a century later with undocumented immigrants crossing the U.S. border with Mexico.

An Indian immigrant named Vaishno Das Bagai had been in the United States for 10 years when he was stripped of his citizenship in 1925

as a result of these rulings. By that time, he had a wife and three children and his own general store on Fillmore Street in San Francisco. He lost the business he had built, because of a California law restricting the economic rights of people who were not citizens. He was left without a passport and thus was thwarted in his attempt to get back to India, and made a man without a country. He was far from his original home and rejected by his new one. One day, he traveled alone to San Jose and rented a room. There, he turned on the gas and ended his life.

No matter which route a borderline applicant took to gain acceptance, the caste system shape-shifted to keep the upper caste pure by its own terms. What a thin, frayed thread held the illusions together. A Japanese novelist once noted that, on paper anyway, it was a single apostrophe that stood between rejection and citizenship for a Japanese Ohara versus an Irish O'Hara.

These cases laid bare not just the absurdity but the inaccuracy of these artificial labels and the perception of purity or pollution implied by them. At the same time, they exposed the unyielding rigidity of a caste system, defiant in the face of evidence contrary to its foundation, how it holds fast against the assault of logic.

THE INTRUSION OF CASTE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

On an otherwise ordinary Sunday afternoon in October 2018, a white woman began to track a black man in Georgia when she saw him out and about with two white children. The black man, Corey Lewis, was the children's babysitter, and from her car, the woman stalked him as he drove them from a Walmart to a gas station and then to his home. She first began tracking Lewis after he did not permit her, a complete stranger, to talk with the older of the two children to confirm to her satisfaction that they were all right.

If there is anything that distinguishes caste in America, it is, first, the policing of roles and behavior expected of people based on what they look like, and second, the monitoring of boundaries — the disregard for the boundaries of subordinated castes or the passionate construction of them by those in the dominating caste, to keep the hierarchy in place.

Modern-day caste protocols are often less about overt attacks or conscious hostility. They are like the wind, powerful enough to knock you down but invisible as they go about their work. They are sustained by the muscle memory of relative rank and the expectations of how one person interacts with others based on their place in the hierarchy. It is a form of status hypervigilance, the entitlement of the dominant caste

to step in and assert itself wherever it chooses, to monitor or dismiss those deemed beneath them, as they see fit.

That afternoon, Lewis, a youth mentor who runs an after-school program, took notice of the woman trailing him and started recording the situation on his cellphone. In a video, the children can be seen calm and unfazed, buckled in their seatbelts in the back of his car.

His voice is strained and disbelieving. "This lady is following me," he says, "because I got two kids in the back seat that do not look like me."

The woman called 911 and asked if she should keep following him. She continued to trail him even though she was told not to. Soon after Lewis arrived home with the children, a patrol car pulled up behind him. An officer got out and headed toward him.

The officer told the children, a 6-year-old boy and a 10-year-old girl, to step out of Lewis's car, and Lewis's voice began to grow tense. The outcome of this police encounter and his safety and very life depended on what those children said, and he asked them to please tell the officer who he was.

"Please," he said to them.

The officer asked the children repeatedly, "Are y'all OK?"

"Jesus have mercy — what is wrong with this country?" a black woman outside cried.

Satisfied that Lewis was, in fact, their babysitter and that the children were not in danger, the officer took the additional step of calling the parents, who were out at dinner.

"It just knocked us out of our chair," the children's father, David Parker, told *The New York Times*.

Caste had intruded into all of their lives. Caste entitlement is not about luxury cars and watches, country clubs and private banks, but knowing without thinking that you are one up from another based on rules not set down on paper but reinforced in commercials, television shows and billboards, from boardrooms to newsrooms to gated subdivisions to who gets killed first in the first half-hour of a movie, and affects everyone up and down the hierarchy. This is the blindsiding banality of caste.

After the incident, a reporter asked the 10-year-old girl, Addison, what she would tell the woman who followed them that day. Her father told *The Times* her response: "I would just ask her to, next time, try to see us as three people rather than three skin colors, because we might've been Mr. Lewis's adopted children."

THE INEVITABLE NARCISSISM OF CASTE

Through no fault of any individual born to it, a caste system centers the dominant caste as the sun

around which all other castes revolve and defines it as the default-setting standard of normalcy, of intellect, of beauty, against which all others are measured, ranked in descending order by their physiological proximity to the dominant caste.

They are surrounded by images of themselves, from cereal commercials to sitcoms, as deserving, hardworking and superior in most aspects of American life, and it would be the rare person who would not absorb the constructed centrality of the dominant group. It would be the rare outliers who would go out of their way to experience the world from the perspective of those considered below them, or even to think about them one way or the other, and the caste system does not require it of them.

Society builds a trapdoor of self-reference that, without any effort on the part of people in the dominant caste, unwittingly forces on them a narcissistic isolation from those assigned to lower categories. It replicates the structure of narcissistic family systems, the interplay of competing supporting roles — the golden-child middle castes of so-called model minorities, the lost-child indigenous peoples and the scapegoat caste at the bottom.

The centrality of the dominant caste is not lost on those considered beneath them in the hierarchy. The highest and lowest rungs are seen as so far apart as to seem planted in place, immovable. Thus those straddling the middle may succumb to the greatest angst and uncertainty as they aspire to a higher rung.

Everyone in the caste system is trained to covet proximity to the dominant caste: an Iranian immigrant feeling the need to mention that a relative had blond hair as a child; a second-generation child of Caribbean immigrants quick to clarify that they are Dominican and categorically not African-American; a Mexican immigrant boasting that one of his grandfathers back in Mexico "looked just like an American" — blond hair and blue eyes — at which point he was reminded by an African-American that Americans come in all colors of hair and eyes.

Those accustomed to being the measure of all that is human can come to depend on the reassurance that while they may have troubles in their lives, at least they are not at the bottom. As long as the designated bottom dwellers remain in their designated place, their own identities and futures seem secure.

"No matter how degraded their lives, white people are still allowed to believe that they possess the blood, the genes, the patrimony of superiority," the political scientist Andrew Hacker wrote in his 1992 book, *"Two Nations."* "No matter what happens, they can never become 'black.'" Hacker continued, "White Americans of all classes have found it comforting to preserve blacks as a subordinate caste: a presence that despite all its pain and problems still provides whites with some solace in a stressful world."

We are accustomed to the concept of narcissism — a complex condition of self-aggrandizing entitlement and disregard of others, growing out of a hollow insecurity — as it applies to individuals. But some scholars apply it to the behavior of nations, tribes and subgroups. Freud was among the earliest psychoanalysts to connect a psychiatric diagnosis to Narcissus of Greek mythology, the son of the river god who fell in love with his own image in a pool of water and, not realizing that it was he who was “spurning” his affection, died in despair. “Narcissus could not conceive that he was in love with his own reflection,” wrote the Harvard clinical psychologist Elsa Ronningstam in her 2005 book, “Identifying and Understanding the Narcissistic Personality.” “He was caught in an illusion.”

So, too, with groups trained to believe in their inherent sovereignty. “The essence of this overestimation of one’s own position and the hate for all who differ from it is narcissism,” wrote Erich Fromm, a leading psychoanalyst and social theorist of the 20th century. “He is nothing,” Fromm wrote, “but if he can identify with his nation, or can transfer his personal narcissism to the nation, then he is everything.”

Fromm well knew the perils of group narcissism from both his training in psychoanalysis and his personal experience. He was born into a Jewish family in Germany and came of age during World War I, witnessing the hatred and fervor that took hold in that conflict, only to see it resurface again with the ascension of the Third Reich. He managed to flee Germany after the Nazis took power in 1933, forced to abandon the psychoanalytic institute he had built, and immigrated to the United States.

He saw firsthand, and through a psychoanalyst’s lens, the seductive power of nationalistic appeals to the anxieties of ordinary people. When a person is deeply invested in his group’s dominance, he “has a euphoric ‘on-top-of-the-world’ feeling, while in reality he is in a state of self-inflation,” Fromm wrote. “This leads to a severe distortion of his capacity to think and to judge. ... He and his are overevaluated. Everything outside is undervalued.” And underneath may lie the fear that he cannot live up to the constructed ideal of his own perfection.

History has shown that nations and groups will conquer, colonize, enslave and kill to maintain the illusion of their primacy. Their investment in this illusion gives them as much of a stake in the inferiority of those deemed beneath them as in their own presumed superiority. “The survival of a group,” Fromm wrote, “depends to some extent on the fact that its members consider its importance as great as or greater than that of their own lives.”

Thus, when under threat, they are willing to sacrifice themselves and their ideals for the survival of the group from which they draw their self-esteem. The political theorist Takamichi

Sakurai, in his 2018 examination of Western and Eastern perspectives on the topic, and channeling Fromm, wrote bluntly: “Group narcissism leads people to fascism.” He went on, “An extreme form of group narcissism means malignant narcissism, which gives rise to a fanatical fascist politics, an extreme racialism and so on.”

Fromm identified this kind of group narcissism in two nations in particular: “the racial narcissism which existed in Hitler’s Germany, and which is found in the American South,” he wrote in 1964, at the height of the civil rights era. In both instances, Fromm found the working class to be among the most susceptible, harboring an “inflated image of itself as the most admirable group in the world, and of being superior to another racial group that is singled out as inferior,” he wrote. A person in this group “feels: ‘Even though I am poor and uncultured, I am somebody important because I belong to the most admirable group in the world — I am white’; or ‘I am an Aryan.’”

A group whipped into narcissistic fervor “is eager to have a leader with whom it can identify,” Fromm wrote. “The leader is then admired by the group which projects its narcissism onto him.” The right kind of leader can inspire a symbiotic connection that supplants logic. The susceptible group, Fromm teaches us, sees itself in the narcissistic leader, becomes one with the leader, sees his fortunes and his fate as their own.

THE PRICE WE PAY FOR A CASTE SYSTEM

In the winter of 2019, an invisible life form awakened in the Eastern Hemisphere and began to spread across the oceans.

The earth’s most powerful nation watched as faraway workers in hazmat gear tested for what no one could see, and deluded itself into believing that American exceptionalism would somehow grant it immunity from the sorrows of other countries.

Yet the virus arrived on these shores, and it planted itself in the gaps of disparity, the torn kinships and fraying infrastructure in the country’s caste system, just as it exploited the weakened immune system in the human body.

Soon, America had the largest coronavirus outbreak in the world. The virus exposed both the vulnerability of all humans and the layers of hierarchy.

While anyone could contract the virus, it was Asian-Americans who were scapegoated for it merely because they looked like the people from the part of the world that the virus first struck. As the crisis wore on, it was African-Americans and Latinos who began dying at higher rates. Pre-existing conditions, often tied to the stresses

on marginalized people, contributed to the divergence. But it was the castelike occupations at the bottom of the hierarchy — grocery clerks, bus drivers, package deliverers, sanitation workers, low-paying jobs with high levels of public contact — that put them at greater risk of contracting the virus in the first place. These are among the muddiest jobs in a pandemic, the jobs less likely to guarantee health coverage or sick days but that sustain the rest of society, allowing others to shelter in place.

As the number of deaths climbed to the highest of all nations, America — and those looking to it for leadership — had to come to terms with the untested fragilities of its social ecosystem. The pandemic, and the country’s fitful, often self-centered lack of readiness, exposed “a failure of character unparalleled in U.S. history,” Stephen Walt, a professor of international relations at Harvard University, wrote in *Foreign Policy*. The pandemic forced the nation to open its eyes to what it might not have wanted to see but needed to see.

“This is a civilization searching for its humanity,” Gary Michael Tartakov, a social and cultural historian, said to me as we discussed caste in America at a conference in 2018. “It dehumanized others to build its civilization. Now it needs to find its own.”

It was earlier that spring that I was forced to face the mystery of the misshapen corner of the ceiling in my own old house and summoned inspectors to try to solve it. One man used an infrared light. Others went into the attic and onto the roof. The bow in the corner had come from a long-ago leak that had grown beyond notice, unattended by a series of previous owners, the moisture from the original leak long evaporated but leaving the plaster weakened over time, heavy and tugging at adjacent seams, inch by inch, until a section of the ceiling was now threatening to cave in on itself and perhaps take the rest of the ceiling with it.

I hadn’t caused this problem, hadn’t been there when the leak first crept toward the ceiling. In fact, I had been the one to install the new roof. But it fell to me to fix it or suffer the consequences. Contractors offered to trim it out and Sheetrock over it. A plasterer said he could replaster the fragile section to blend with the rest of the old ceiling. It would be indistinguishable to the naked eye but would not protect against further weakness in what remained of the original plaster, strained as it was from the adjacent frailties.

The only way to truly fix it, he said, was to tear out the plaster, down to the beams, inspect and rebuild the rotting lath and replaster the entire ceiling. And so we did. It took days to scrape and inspect, recast and reconstruct. When it was done, it was quietly glorious, as ceilings go.

And I could breathe free, knowing, as we now are called upon to do in our era, in the house we all live in, that it was sound and secure, not merely patched and papered over, but maybe even better than it was, for ourselves and for the generations that come after us. ♦

about confidential investigations, said he came into contact with Jameel in 2015. The official, also a Muslim, already knew Hakeem, Jameel's brother. "Hakeem wanted me to have a word with Jameel," he said, because "he was maintaining very rigid, extreme ideas." When they first met, in a mosque, Jameel spoke for four hours. "He was so good as a speaker!" the official said. "Ooh, he was excellent! And he was trying to manipulate me." Now considering him a friend, Jameel gave the official a handbook on Wahhabism, the strict strain of Islam that has put more Muslim women in veils and men in thick beards. "He took me to bookshops that had no names and that stocked these kinds of ideological books. He knew where to go to find such books, clearly."

In 2014 or 2015, soon after returning from Australia, Jameel met the Ibrahims — most likely in Mahawila Gardens, where he hung out at Hakeem's house. Ilham and Jameel took to each other: long chats in the mornings after prayers, upstairs in Ilham's room; long chats in the evenings, on the veranda; long chats as Ilham drove up and down the avenue lining the ocean. Late one night, one of the Ibrahims' neighbors, out for a stroll, spotted Jameel and Ilham in a parked car, crouched over laptops. The intelligence official thinks Jameel first recruited the wayward Ilham — to a cause as yet indistinct, for an act as yet undecided. Then, he said, they groomed Inshaf together.

Roping families into acts of terror is a new pattern in the ISIS franchise model, Hoffman, the insurgency scholar, told me. It happened in Barcelona in 2017, when three sets of brothers participated in an attack; it happened in Indonesia in 2018, when a family bombed three churches in Surabaya. "It's a real, problematic wrinkle," Hoffman says, "because penetrating family networks becomes impossible. What informant do you plant inside a family? What suspicions can they arouse by consorting with one another?"

From 2015 onward, there are gaps in our knowledge of the Ibrahims. Intelligence officials can only offer theories: about how, for instance, Jameel pulled the brothers into the orbit of Zaharan Hashim, a preacher in eastern Sri Lanka who uploaded fanatical videos to YouTube and whose followers once took up swords to assault a Sufi rally. (Sufis are considered heretics by many Islamic conservatives.) Zaharan was both a beneficiary and an agent of a well-studied trend that has, for a couple of decades, been shaping Sri Lankan Islam. From Saudi Arabia, rich patrons send money and clerics to build new mosques and seed Wahhabism. Well before Easter, the authorities knew that Zaharan was kindling violence in the name of orthodoxy; that he instigated the vandalism of Buddhist statues in the town of Mawanella in 2018; that he most likely had links with quasi-militant organizations outside

'What informant do you plant inside a family? What suspicions can they arouse by consorting with one another?'

the country, including in India. In January 2019, following leads from Mawanella, the police found weapons and 220 pounds of explosives on a farm in Wanathavilluwa, up the coast from Colombo. Intelligence agencies in India and Sri Lanka warned the government that Zaharan was plotting a suicide attack.

Only afterward did they learn that Zaharan had possibly received an education in terrorism in India; that he had set up safe houses in Sri Lanka to train his men; that the money for at least one such house came from Inshaf. This house, near Wanathavilluwa, was disguised as a poultry farm. "There was a lagoon on one side," the intelligence official said. "A direct run from South India. All these explosives and chemicals could have come through that sea route." A brother of Zaharan's built the bombs, *The Wall Street Journal* reported. He taught himself bomb-making online, and although he lost fingers and damaged an eye in these experiments, he learned enough to jury-rig triggers out of washing-machine timers. A few days before Easter, they successfully blew up a motorcycle. Somehow, Zaharan had rustled up a band of men, persuaded them to incinerate their bodies and those of hundreds of others and furnished them with the bombs to do it.

Zaharan was pudgy and empty-eyed, with a habit of waggling his index finger as he raved and yelled. His videos had barbaric green-screen backdrops: One showed a town on fire, presumably during one of the riots against Muslims; another showed a knife and a splatter of gore. There was nothing coded or subtle about what he said. "Buddhist *kafirs*, we will come for you," he said. "You will have to scrape up your scattered bodies."

Around 2017, Zaharan talked openly about supporting ISIS. "He pitched himself as an ISIS representative in Sri Lanka, while putting forth very little evidence of it," says Amarnath Amarasingam, an assistant professor in the School of Religion at Queen's University in Ontario and an ISIS specialist. It never seemed as if ISIS were paying Sri Lanka any attention. Kabir Taneja, a fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, spent years lurking in ISIS chat rooms

as research for a book on ISIS in South Asia. "Sri Lanka was almost never mentioned," Taneja says. Analysts like Taneja believe that, like some other ISIS-inspired attacks, these bombings weren't a top-down directive. Rather, Zaharan and his associates set themselves up as a satellite operation, committing their acts in the caliphate's name. In a report published last September, the International Crisis Group called Zaharan "an extraordinary outlier." One outlier is all it takes.

But even if Zaharan wasn't being overseen directly by ISIS in Syria or Iraq, he may have relied upon other forms of assistance. The bombings were too elaborate to have been cobbled together locally, Hoffman says. "The expertise had to have been acquired from somewhere else." One possibility is that Zaharan was plugged into an ISIS affiliate in the area. Hoffman singled out a node called ISIS Khorasan, which adapts an old name for the region where Central Asia melds into South Asia. This node, Hoffman says, is attached to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, and it's likely that Sri Lanka falls into its purview.

ISIS Khorasan splintered out of the Pakistani Taliban in 2015 — a few thousand fighters who decided, as Taneja says, "that if you wear an ISIS T-shirt, you'll get a spotlight to fall on you." The same year, an ISIS spokesman officially recognized ISIS Khorasan as an arm of the caliphate. From 2015 to 2019, while it was gathering influence and conducting attacks across Pakistan and Afghanistan, ISIS Khorasan would most likely have had direct lines of communication with ISIS in Iraq and Syria, Taneja says. Though it held little territory of its own, ISIS Khorasan took on some of the caliphate's traits, "urging South Asian Muslims to come join them."

Zaharan's connection with an ISIS node explains certain aspects of the bombings. The idea to strike churches and hotels, for instance, might have been provided by an ISIS network. When the police raided one of Zaharan's safe houses, they found orange robes and white clothes — a clue that he might have initially schemed to attack Buddhist gatherings. ISIS doesn't care about that kind of local impact, Amarasingam says. "For them, it's always been tourists and Christians." When I first spoke to Taneja, last December, he thought it unlikely that ISIS Khorasan had the ability to orchestrate an attack in Colombo. By June, he was less certain of that; new research had shown that local ISIS nodes had more sway than previously thought. The complexity of the bombs suggests that an explosives specialist might have traveled in and out of Sri Lanka to advise Zaharan and his crew, he says. "But how did they do this over months and months without triggering a warning? Where did the money to finance this come from? These are questions no one has answers to."

After the bombings, there was a backlash against Muslims. In west-central Sri Lanka, during a mid-May weekend, shops, houses and mosques were

set afire or vandalized. A Muslim-owned factory and its pasta-making equipment were destroyed. One Muslim carpenter was stabbed to death in his workshop. Hundreds of refugees from Pakistan and Afghanistan, forced out of their homes by hostile landlords and threatening mobs, had to move for their own safety into police-run camps. After a rumor spread that a Muslim doctor had sterilized 4,000 Buddhist women without their knowledge, he was held for two months under an antiterrorism law.

The presidential election was on the horizon, and the bombings made it vital for politicians to style themselves as guarantors of national security. For four months, the government banned the niqab, which some Muslim women wear to cover their faces and bodies. A Buddhist monk, serving six years in prison for contempt of court, received a presidential pardon and resumed his place among the most vocal Buddhist militants in the country. The monk belonged to the Bodu Bala Sena, a Buddhist nationalist group that began calling for an exclusively Sinhalese government. “Muslims don’t love us,” a prominent priest said. Don’t eat at Muslim-owned restaurants, he went on. “They have fed poison to our people.” Days later, sharing a stage with this priest, President Maithripala Sirisena said that Sri Lanka ought to heed its Buddhist clergy. You will have heard what the priest said, Sirisena added. “I am not going to say anything about it.”

From the opposition, Gotabaya Rajapaksa announced his decision to run for president. He had been the defense secretary until 2014 under the presidency of his brother, Mahinda, and was accused of war crimes and extrajudicial assassinations. (Last year, he faced two civil lawsuits in California courts — one by 11 Tamil and Sinhalese people who accused Rajapaksa of ordering their torture, and another by the daughter of a Sri Lankan journalist who was believed to have been murdered on Rajapaksa’s instructions. Rajapaksa has denied the charges; while campaigning for the presidency, he called the lawsuits “a little distraction.” After he won, he became immune to prosecution, so the plaintiffs dropped their actions; they can still pursue them whenever he leaves office.) Sirisena was too fond of talking about human rights and individual freedoms, Rajapaksa said, promising to dismantle Islamist radicalism by mounting surveillance of Muslim groups. In November, Rajapaksa won with a comfortable majority; the data showed his popularity among Tamils and Muslims to be feeble. “The main message of the election,” he told Agence France-Presse, “is that it was the Sinhalese majority vote that allowed me to win.”

Rajapaksa didn’t have time to make any sweeping moves before the coronavirus sent Sri Lanka into lockdown. But he has managed to signal his approach to dissidents and minorities. In February, when the government celebrated Independence Day, Sri Lanka’s anthem was sung

only in Sinhalese. A police officer who had been investigating corruption and murder accusations against Rajapaksa and his allies received death threats after the election and fled to Switzerland. Rajapaksa named army officers accused of war crimes as his defense secretary and his acting chief of defense; the second appointment was so egregious that the Trump administration barred his entry into the United States. Human Rights Watch reported that activists and the families of Tamils who “disappeared” during the war are being intimidated and kept under surveillance.

The pandemic provided cover for some of these actions. In mid-April, Hejaaz Hizbullah, the lawyer who sometimes represented Hajjar, received a phone call from someone claiming to be a health official. He was led to believe that an A.T.M. he used might have been contaminated with the coronavirus and was asked to wait at home for a testing team. Instead, the Criminal Investigation Department arrived, searched his files without a warrant and subsequently arrested him. A police representative told journalists that the Easter Sunday investigations were being “reopened with a fresh approach” and that Hizbullah, having known the Ibrahims, was suspected of involvement in the attacks. But an outcry arose over the arrest; the International Commission of Jurists has deemed it “arbitrary,” and Amnesty International accused the government of targeting Hizbullah for “his professional work as a lawyer in various civil and political rights cases.” For weeks after Hizbullah’s arrest, the C.I.D. didn’t produce him before a magistrate, as required by law, and he was permitted to meet at length with his lawyers only after long delays. One of Hizbullah’s associates told me that the authorities cited worries over the spread of the coronavirus as the reason to restrict access to him.

The prospect of Rajapaksa’s presidency had deeply worried Sri Lanka’s Muslims. If the past is any guide, he will cite terrorism as a reason to trample their rights, giving them perpetual cause to doubt their safety. In this way, Zaharan will earn for his community exactly the sort of victimization he vowed to avenge, and the

state will sow the ground for exactly the sort of extremism it vows to uproot.

To get the Ibrahim brothers to enact their suicidal violence, Zaharan must have convinced them of two things. The first was the importance of being uncompromising in their religious practice. The second was the notion that in Sri Lanka, Islam would wither away if its defenders didn’t fight for it. The riots against Muslims in 2018, in the midst of the Ibrahims’ radicalization, fanned that belief further. But even from here, the men had to traverse a final, moral distance to justify to themselves the slaughter of innocent people. How they did that is unknown, unknowable.

Around 2016, Ilham took his two oldest children out of school and taught them at home, and, although they weren’t quite old enough to pray, he took them to the mosque every evening. He began to parrot Jameel’s words, arguing that only God could frame the law for Muslims. (“Don’t follow the highway code then!” one interlocutor shot back in exasperation.) Ilham kept asking one brother, an atheist, to return to prayer and fast during Ramadan, then severed ties with him entirely. Ilham also stopped talking to his 93-year-old grandmother, who argued with him about his new rigidities. *You’re wasting your time*, Hajjar told him heatedly. *You have to do things in proportion. Your workers out there at the pepper farm have nothing to eat but stones, and you’re here talking about religion.*

Inshaf also grew out his beard, and he, too, stopped speaking to his atheist brother. In 2018, the brothers quit Ishana’s board. Inshaf had always been uneasy with Hajjar taking out bank loans, because earning interest conflicts with Islamic strictures. But since 2016, he and Ilham grew more insistent, pressing Hajjar to stop borrowing money. As a director, Inshaf signed loan documents; he was worried that “for signing them, he’d have to answer to Allah,” the Ishana manager said. But Hajjar refused. He was a pragmatic man who liked the handsome returns from real estate, and he needed some leverage from time to time. Inshaf saw this as unnecessary greed. He ran his copper factory without any loans.

His staff found that he had become fond of moralizing. He talked about the path to heaven, about the principles of Islam. Late in 2018, he pressed copies of a book upon some employees, saying it held the truest account of the Prophet’s life. In a plastic crate near Inshaf’s desk, I noticed five volumes he hadn’t managed to give away. They were still in cellophane wrapping, sealed with their price tags still visible. In the conference room, I was shown more than 200 other books, a small seminary’s worth. “He bought all these over the last three years,” the manager said, laying some of the English titles out upon the table: “Islamic Verdicts on the Pillars of Islam,” “In Pursuit of Allah’s Pleasure,” “The Hardness of the Heart.”

For those who knew Inshaf well, it would have been impossible to

(Continued on Page 57)

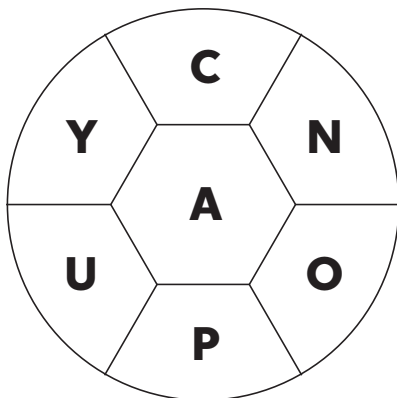
‘Your workers out there at the pepper farm have nothing to eat but stones, and you’re here talking about religion.’

SPELLING BEE

By Frank Longo

How many common words of 5 or more letters can you spell using the letters in the hive? Every answer must use the center letter at least once. Letters may be reused in a word. At least one word will use all 7 letters. Proper names and hyphenated words are not allowed. Score 1 point for each answer, and 3 points for a word that uses all 7 letters.

Rating: 9 = good; 15 = excellent; 21 = genius

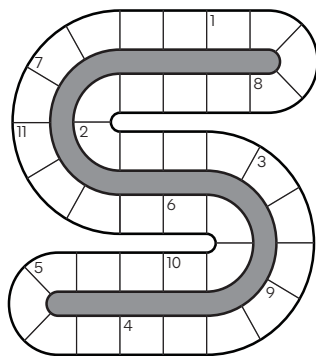


Our list of words, worth 24 points, appears with last week's answers.

SNAKE CHARMER

By Patrick Berry

Each answer begins in the correspondingly numbered space and proceeds clockwise around the S, ending in the space before the next consecutive number. The chain of 11 answers will snake its way around the grid twice.



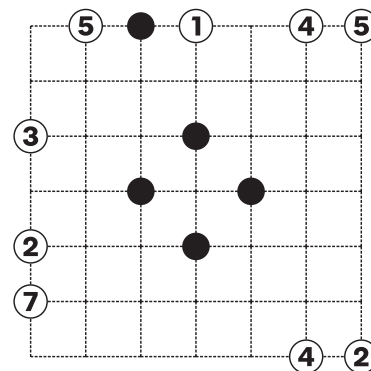
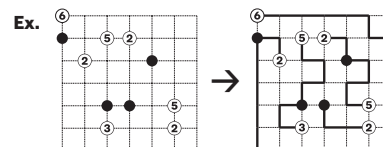
Clues

- Short-lived designs made by baristas (2 wds.)
- Sheriff Andy Taylor's boy on old TV 3. Maker of corporate jets 4. Actress Russell of "The Americans" 5. Section of the G.R.E. 6. Doesn't bother (2 wds.) 7. Not curl up at the edges (2 wds.) 8. Destroy by ripping up (3 wds.) 9. It flows through Hells Canyon (2 wds.) 10. "Swan Lake" and the like 11. Firm conviction

GAS LINES

By Tinh Van Duc Lai

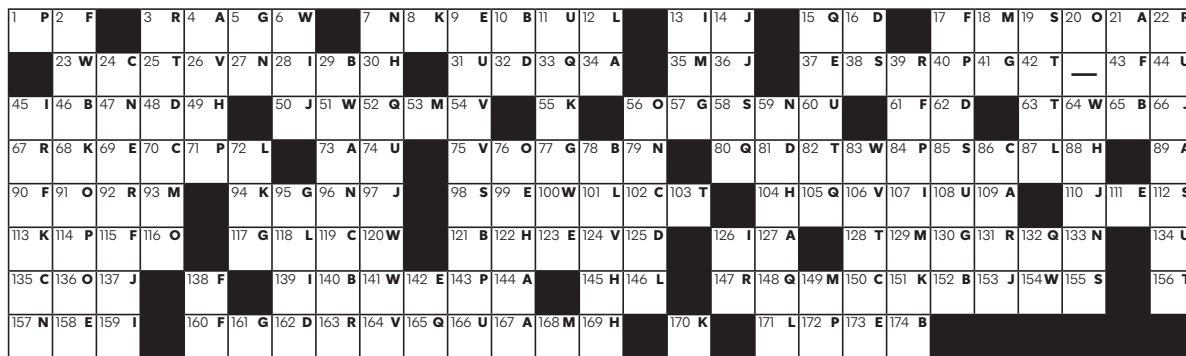
Connect each home (circled number) to a gas utility (black circle) by a line that follows the dots. The line must have the number of straight segments indicated. No lines can touch.



ACROSTIC

By Emily Cox & Henry Rathvon

Guess the words defined below and write them over their numbered dashes. Then transfer each letter to the correspondingly numbered square in the pattern. Black squares indicate word endings. The filled pattern will contain a quotation reading from left to right. The first letters of the guessed words will form an acrostic giving the author's name and the title of the work.



A. Singer of the 1982 hit "Workin' for a Livin'" (2 wds.)

89 167 34 127 109 4 21 73 144

B. Job attending to travelers

78 46 10 121 140 174 65 152 29

C. Stand for one reading aloud

24 70 150 102 119 86 135

D. Bugged

81 162 16 32 62 48 125

E. Depiction of a land's ups and downs (2 wds.)

99 123 111 142 9 173 69 158 37

F. Peruvian singer famed for her extraordinary vocal range (2 wds.)

2 61 138 43 17 115 90 160

G. Fall behind in a race or project (2 wds.)

57 161 130 41 117 95 5 77

H. Hard to extract without a key

30 122 104 145 49 169 88

I. Boost, spark, spur

13 126 107 45 159 28 139

J. Problem for those who are strapped (2 wds.)

153 110 14 97 36 66 137 50

K. Route 66, for example

151 55 8 113 94 170 68

L. Whom to know, per a Delphic maxim

72 118 12 101 87 171 146

M. Marking that might appear on a butterfly or peacock

129 149 53 93 18 35 168

N. Causes to move (usually up) incrementally

79 7 96 59 157 133 47 27

O. Monster bested by Zeus and buried under Mount Etna

136 116 56 76 20 91

P. Native to a particular region or people

143 71 40 114 1 172 84

Q. 1975 song that lent its name to a hit musical and two films (2 wds.)

132 105 33 80 148 52 165 15

R. Remarks meant to belittle (hyph.)

147 131 3 92 67 39 22 163

S. Pariah, persona non grata

38 85 19 112 58 155 98

T. Back-to-the-land movement?

42 25 63 82 156 128 103

U. "An inevitable occurrence due to the action of immutable natural laws," per Ambrose Bierce

108 44 11 134 31 60 74 166

V. Source of walking sticks and wickerwork

106 124 164 75 26 54

W. Holiday observed with fasting and prayer (2 wds.)

120 51 64 154 83 23 6 100 141

Answers to puzzles of 6.28.20

POWER-UPS

C	O	A	R	S	E			H	A	S	T	E			A	S	P	I	C
A	P	P	E	N	D	S		C	O	S	S	E	T		P	L	O	U	G
T	H	E	D	U	D	E		R	A	H	R	A	H		A	L	U	M	N
S	E	X		G	A	L	L	E	R	Y		M	I	S	T		S	P	O
P	L	A	Y		S	L	A	V	S		R	O	O	T	E	D		I	R
A	I	M	E	E			P	I	E	T	A		P	A	L	M	T	R	E
W	A	S	A	T	C	H		C	R	O	W	D	I	N		C	H	O	I
							C	H	A	S	E		P	R	E	A	C	H	E
C	U	T	S		O	U	T	S	E	T		I	N	H	E	L	L		
A	L	A	C	R	I	T	Y		R	E	P	O			R	U	B	O	F
B	A	S	R	A		E	X	P	O	N	E	N	T	S		N	O	L	I
S	N	E	E	Z	Y		I	S	L	E		O	I	N	T		M	E	N
						A	Z	A	L	E	A		I	N	S	O	L	E	B
	T	A	M			W	O	L	V	E	S		C	L	O	S	E		
T	H	R	E	W		S	M	E	L	T	E	R		S	T	P	E	T	E
R	E	T	R	E	A	T	S		A	S	S	A	M			S	N	A	R
I	F	S		B	O	T	T	O	M		S	W	A	B	S		C	L	U
R	A	C	E		K	O	R	N		W	E	L	C	O	M	E		E	D
E	T	A	L	I	A		E	L	A	I	N	E		N	E	A	T	N	I
M	E	M	O	R	Y		E	A	R	N	E	D		G	A	V	O	T	T
E	S	S	I	E			T	Y	K	E	S			R	E	E	S	E	S

KENKEN

4	1	3	2	5
1	4	5	3	2
2	5	1	4	3
5	3	2	1	4
3	2	4	5	1

2	4	1	3	6	5	7
3	7	6	1	4	2	5
5	6	4	7	3	1	2
6	2	7	5	1	3	4
7	3	5	6	2	4	1
4	1	3	2	5	7	6
1	5	2	4	7	6	3

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

M	U	S	E	U	M		C	O	M	E	U	P	O	N
A	O	P		S	X	E								
C	O	N	E	S	T	O	G	A		C	O	N	I	C
E	I	T		R	G	I		I		K				
R	I	C	H	A	R	D		E	N	T	I	T	L	E
A	R	E		E		E		L						
T	R	A	C	T		R	A	M	A	D	A	N		
E	B		L	A		C	D							
I	O	T		E	A		C	R	E	T	E			
S	O	L	I	C	I	T		I	M	P	A	L	E	S
L	V	E		R		T	A	E						
A	L	L	E	N		A	L	A	S	T	E			
N	N	S		C		A	H	T						
D	O	G	G	E	R	L		U	N	L	E	S	S	

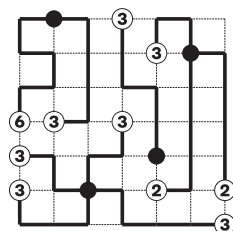
ACROSS: 1. m(ise)um 4. co(me)upon 9. c(ones)t. + oga (rev. ago) 11. comic (substituting n for m) 12. hidden geriatric hardly 13. E.N.T. + it + le 14. homophone tracked 16. r(a + mad)an 19. sp(ay)ed 21. concrete – con 23. so + licit 25. I'm + p + ales 27. a(lie)n

DOWN: 1. mace rate 2. so + nice – e 3. upst + art (anag. puts) 5. 0 + sage 6. ex + cited 7. pen(l + ten)ce 8. nick + el 10. two meanings 15. a + B + solving 17. made + I.R.A. 18. rev. stressed 20. anag. silence 21. C(ap)tain 22. is + L + and 24. t + race 26. la + the

SMART SET

- Bad blood
- Love life
- Slit skirt
- Black book
- Foot fault
- Snail shell
- Pension plan
- Freeze frame
- Gained ground
- Coin collection
- Planters peanuts
- Color commentator

GAS LINES



Answers to puzzle on Page 56

to include them in your score. legitimate dictionary words in the beehive, feel free poppy, uncanny, uncopy, yuppy, yucca. If you found other copy, nappy, papacy, papaya, pappy, canon, cany, canopy, canyon, capon, cocoa, occupancy (3 points). Also: Annoy, cocao, cancan, SPELLING BEE

Sri Lanka

(Continued from Page 55)

interpret this piety as preparation for a suicide bombing. In curious ways, he still appeared to be a man living for the future. He renovated the Colossus factory during this time: more office space, better furniture, new machinery that arrived in February 2019. Well in advance, he booked a trip for his family to Mecca, to be there for the end of Ramadan in early June. It was as if he was denying what he had planned for himself, or as if one part of his life was progressing through sheer inertia even as he was coldly calculating the other. A few weeks before Easter, he transferred the ownership of his house and factory to his wife without her knowledge, the Ishana manager told me. In his last year, Inshaf's routine transformed. He rarely went to Ishana and went to Colossus just for two or three hours daily. Instead, he took his children to school and picked them up; he spent his mornings with his wife, his afternoons with his children and his evenings with his mother, like a man who knew that he was running out of time.

On Wednesday, April 17, around the start of the pepper-harvest season, the intelligence official ran into Inshaf at a mosque. *How's business?* he asked. Inshaf replied that he was headed to Zambia for work.

On Thursday evening, Inshaf went by Old Moor Street. He had bought a new car, a Mitsubishi Montero, for 34 million rupees, and it was delivered that day. He parked outside the office but didn't go in; instead, an employee came out to collect the car's documents and to bring him a batch of 10 blank checks to sign. He always did this when he left the country, in case expenses had to be met. Inshaf took some cash as well, which he put into a bag and stowed in the car's

trunk. It was a new bag, the employee noticed — a knapsack.

On Friday, Inshaf's wife rode with him to the Colombo airport to see him off to Zambia. A report in *The Sun* in Britain claimed that, unusually, he held his wife's head and said, "Be strong." Then, having pretended to catch his flight, he doubled back to Colombo and joined Zaharan, Jameel, Ilham and at least four other men in an apartment in the center of the city.

The next day, around 1 in the afternoon, Inshaf checked into Room 425 in the Cinnamon Grand. He provided a fake name, Mohamed Mubarak Mohamed Azzam, and a fake address: 138/B New Moor Street. Later, he left the hotel, presumably to go back to the apartment to join his collaborators. He didn't return to the Cinnamon Grand until 7:07 a.m. on Sunday, when a small blue car dropped him off at the hotel.

Which means he had almost two hours in his room that morning, by himself: long enough to look at his backpack and its contents, think about his wife, children and parents and pull out of his monstrous mission. He could have fled the hotel, chucked his bomb into the sea and gone home to grieve his brother and support his father. With time, he might have resumed his life: the copper business, the cricket games, the community dinners during Ramadan. But perhaps he thought that he had already gone too far, that there could never be any normalcy for him even if he left. Or perhaps he never considered any of this at all.

Shortly before 9 a.m., Inshaf left his room wearing a baseball cap and carrying his knapsack. He made his way to the ground floor and passed through the atrium, where giant urnlike lamps lit the space like beacons. He descended the staircase to Taprobane, gave his room number at the entrance and walked into the breakfast buffet. ♦

KENKEN

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 5x5 grid will use the digits 1–5. A 7x7 grid will use 1–7.

5+		3-		1-
5	2-	3+		
1-		1-	1-	
	1		12×	6+
2÷		5		

2÷		14+	3-	24×	6+
4-			1-		
	12×		6×	5	
5	9+		11+	6×	11+
1-			5+		
3-		6	3-	8+	
3-		1-		42×	

TO-DO LIST

By Laura Taylor Kinnel

Laura Taylor Kinnel, of Newtown, Pa., teaches math and is the director of studies at a Friends boarding school near Philadelphia. Since her last puzzle appeared in March, she has spent lots of time with colleagues developing best methods and new processes for remote learning. Laura remarks that she was sitting and conducting classes from home in the same spot where she normally makes crosswords! — W.S.

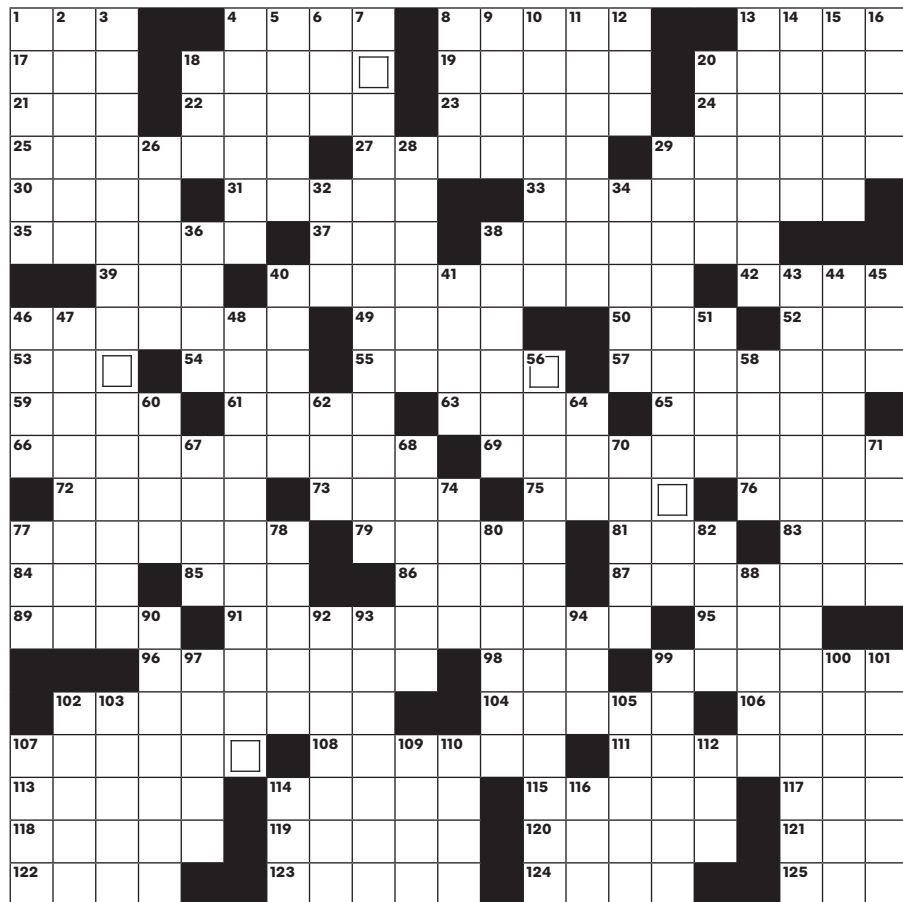
ACROSS

- 1 1/48 of a cup: Abbr.
- 4 Ad Council offerings, for short
- 8 Home of the Kaaba
- 13 Spartan
- 17 "The Problem With ____" (2017 documentary)
- 18 Orator's platform
- 19 "Never meet your ____" (maxim)
- 20 Less wild
- 21 Done working: Abbr.
- 22 About which you might always say, "Bee prepared"?
- 23 They take the form of self-flying paper airplanes in the Harry Potter books
- 24 Topping for a 25-Across
- 25 Piece of cake, say
- 27 Improv-class exercises
- 29 Kids
- 30 Without aim
- 31 Mob
- 33 Fish whose males bear the young
- 35 Evening gala
- 37 Note-taking spot?
- 38 Sustained period of luck, as with dice
- 39 Litter critter
- 40 Floor-plan unit
- 42 Restless desire
- 46 What Franklin famously asked for
- 49 Floor-plan spec
- 50 Blog-feed inits.
- 52 Debtor's letters
- 53 Email holder
- 54 Something lent to a friend
- 55 Set of skills, metaphorically
- 57 Father of Scout, in "To Kill a Mockingbird"
- 59 Declare
- 61 Best-actor winner Malek
- 63 Normandy battle site
- 65 Wads
- 66 Last dance?
- 69 Managed an unmanageable group, figuratively

- 72 Wonder Woman accessory
- 73 Aware of
- 75 Playroom chest
- 76 Downwind
- 77 They're worn on heads with tails
- 79 Store
- 81 Was first
- 83 Ka ____ (southernmost point on Hawaii)
- 84 Prefix with -graph
- 85 Run on
- 86 Singer Brickell
- 87 Believed something without question
- 89 Commercial lead-in to land
- 91 Elizabeth Warren vis-à-vis former chief justice Earl Warren, e.g.
- 95 It's frequently under fire
- 96 Prepare to bathe
- 98 Olivia Benson's division on TV: Abbr.
- 99 Conditional word
- 102 Expressively creative
- 104 First of the metalloids
- 106 Border
- 107 Flight recorder
- 108 ____ complex
- 111 A much greater quantity
- 113 Lead-in to fit or active
- 114 ____ New Guinea
- 115 Foreword
- 117 Org. that kicked off again in 2020 after a 19-year hiatus
- 118 Studio behind "Platoon" and "Amadeus"
- 119 Salary negotiator
- 120 Adversary
- 121 Embodiment of slipperiness
- 122 Word before or after short
- 123 One of the six simple machines
- 124 State pair: Abbr.
- 125 Mrs., in Mexico

DOWN

- 1 Transportation for the Doctor on "Doctor Who"
- 2 Small suit



- 3 Tries to make the unappealing attractive
- 4 Eeyore-ish sentiment
- 5 Stocking stuffer
- 6 Donkey Kong, e.g.
- 7 Imbroglios
- 8 Play charades
- 9 Setting for a Sistine Chapel painting
- 10 Results from
- 11 Near
- 12 "Methought I was enamour'd of an ____": Titania
- 13 Brand of rum
- 14 Improper
- 15 Best-actress winner Zellweger
- 16 Tiny fractions of joules
- 18 "____ Would Be King," 2018 novel by Wayétu Moore
- 20 Attach, in a way
- 26 Stack topper
- 28 Iconic Chevy
- 29 "You nailed it!"
- 32 ____ page
- 34 Spanish "now"
- 36 Olympic pentathlete's need
- 38 Well-being
- 40 Purse part

- 41 Flying Clouds and Royales
- 43 Be fully qualified ... or a hint to this puzzle's theme
- 44 Author of "The Silent World: A Story of Undersea Discovery and Adventure"
- 45 Czech reformer Jan
- 46 Coastal inlets
- 47 It might get a licking
- 48 Combination meant to change behavior
- 51 Starter earring
- 56 Play piano, informally
- 58 Machu Picchu builder
- 60 Something frequently made with the eyes shut
- 62 X-ray alternative, maybe
- 64 Spanish treasure
- 67 Anthem starter
- 68 Businesses with a portmanteau name
- 70 "It Ain't Me Babe" songwriter
- 71 Percolate
- 74 Zip
- 77 No. in a directory
- 78 Wimbledon wear, perhaps

- 80 Chooses not to act
- 82 Academia figure
- 88 It follows the Hijri calendar
- 90 Protruding bit of bedrock
- 92 Form a new mental picture of
- 93 Got away
- 94 Sharing word
- 97 Canon competitor
- 99 Leaves weaponless
- 100 One participating in a new Summer Olympics sport in 2021
- 101 Fashion designer McCartney
- 102 Heads-up
- 103 Two to one, say
- 105 Time and again
- 107 Warner ____
- 109 Like the Liberty Bell in 1846, for the last time
- 110 Big name in British art
- 112 Hall-of-Fame catcher Campanella
- 114 Print maker
- 116 Tulsa-to-Des Moines dir.

Puzzles Online Today's puzzle and more than 9,000 past puzzles: nytimes.com/crosswords (\$39.95 a year). For the daily puzzle commentary: nytimes.com/wordplay.

on days off
on off-days
on rainy Sundays
if you're alone
if you're on the phone
if your family is home
as a sweet treat
for a savory supper
for a spicy night
to master the basics
to sharpen your skills
to mix up your menu

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Millions suffer because of isolation and loneliness. Can virtual reality help?

What can rocket science tell us about the game of basketball?

Why is a thousand-year-old winemaking technique making a comeback?

Can a computer be trained to compose a hit song?

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INNOVATION UNCOVERED



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